

CONTESTING AMERICANNES IN THE CONTEMPORARY
ASIAN AMERICAN *BILDUNGSROMAN*

by

JI YOUNG YOON

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Student: Ji Young Yoon

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This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of English by:

David L. Li	Chair
Mary E. Wood	Core Member
Helen E. Southworth	Core Member
Jiannbin L. Shiao	Institutional Representative

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research and Innovation; Dean of the Graduate School
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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Ji Young Yoon

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Title: Contesting Americanness in the Contemporary Asian American *Bildungsroman*

My study examines contemporary Asian American narratives of subject formation through the theoretical lens of the *Bildungsroman*. A European genre originating in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteen-century Germany, the conventional *Bildungsroman* is a literary tool whose main objective is to depict an idealized subject's modern socialization. As Franco Moretti nicely captures in his study of the *Bildungsroman*, *The Way of the World*, the genre's significance is, above all, its successful representation of a reconciliation of an individual's revolting desires and society's regulatory demands. While highlighting a harmonious convergence of an individual and society, Moretti points to a white European subject's becoming a normative citizen in the rise of bourgeois capitalism. American writers of Asian descent have both utilized and transformed the conventional *Bildungsroman* form to describe their particular subject formation in the United States. The Asian American *Bildungsroman* differs from the white American as well as the European *Bildungsroman*, both formally and thematically, mainly because the racial group's social, political, and economic conditions have been marked by the U.S. exclusion of Asians. Asian American writers' generic interventions of the *Bildungsroman* thus exhibit their distinctive formal interventions and textual strategies to respond to legal and social exclusions of Asians in this country. In reading

four Asian American narratives of subject formation—either novelistic or (auto)biographical in form—I argue the writers invented new versions of the genre, including the *communal*, the *assimilative*, the *deconstructive*, and the *competitive Bildungsromane*. This dissertation examines how conditions of textual expressions of the contemporary Asian American *Bildungsroman* have been not only predominantly marked by race but also further affected by class. The significance of the Asian American *Bildungsroman* is at once its interrogation of the contradiction within the American ideals and its construction of Asian American subjecthood.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Ji Young Yoon

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
State University of New York at Binghamton
Chungnam National University, Daejeon, South Korea

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2014, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, English, 2009, State University of New York at Binghamton
Master of Arts, English, 2006, Chungnam National University
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2004, Chungnam National University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTERESTS:

Twentieth Century and Contemporary American Literature
Bildungsroman (Coming-of-Age Novel)
Asian American Studies
Theories of Race, Ethnicity, and Nation

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES:

Instructor of Record, College Compositions, Department of English, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2010 to present
Instructor of Record, Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Department of English, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2013
Teaching Assistant, Introduction to English Major, Department of English, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2013

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, English, 2009 to present

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*For all my family—
through blood, law, happenstance, or choice.*

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION:
INTERROGATING AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC IDEALS, THE POSSESSIVE
INDIVIDUAL, AND THE ABSTRACT CITIZEN IN THE CONTEMPORARY
ASIAN AMERICAN *BILDUNGSROMAN*

My study focuses on the contemporary Asian American *Bildungsroman* published during the last couple of decades. A European genre originating in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteen-century Germany, the conventional *Bildungsroman* is a literary tool whose main objective is to depict an idealized subject's modern socialization. As Franco Moretti nicely captures in his study of the *Bildungsroman*, *The Way of the World*, the genre's significance is, above all, its successful representation of a reconciliation of an individual's revolting desires and society's regulatory demands. "Representing this fusion (of individuation and socialization) with a force of conviction," Moretti notes, the *Bildungsroman* shows how "[o]ne's formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one's social integration" (16). While highlighting a harmonious convergence of an individual and society, Moretti points to a white European subject's victorious becoming a normative citizen in the rise of bourgeois capitalism. American writers of Asian descent have at once utilized and transformed the conventional *Bildungsroman* form to describe their particular subject formation in the United States. The Asian American *Bildungsroman*, however, differs from the white American as well as the European *Bildungsroman*, both formally and thematically, mainly because the racial group's social, political, and economic conditions have been

marked by the U.S. history of Asian exclusion. Asian American writers' generic interventions of the *Bildungsroman* thus exhibit the distinctive ways in which they respond to legal and social exclusions of Asians in this country. This dissertation examines how conditions of formal expressions of the contemporary Asian American *Bildungsroman* have been not only predominantly marked by race but also further affected by class.

Contesting Americanness in the Contemporary Asian American Bildungsroman is based on three points: Firstly, the *Bildungsroman* presumes a partial and particular subject as its protagonist who is tantamount to a "possessive," idealized U.S. citizen living in a raceless and classless society. Secondly, there is an allied relation between the literary space of the *Bildungsroman* and the geopolitical space of the U.S. nation-state. For both assume the image of a self-made man, being free from aristocratic relations, and valorize the democratic ideals of individual freedom and autonomy. Lastly, the *Bildungsroman* thus serves as a vehicle to better observe, and challenge, the acclaimed interests of a U.S. national ethos. The Asian American *Bildungsroman* inscribing the U.S. nation-state's only partial accomplishment of its promises, is a helpful tool to investigate the ways in which the U.S. nation-state has created its particular liberalism, individualism, and democracy while forging the universalizing concepts of American democratic ideals, the possessive individual, and the abstract citizen.

Moretti's *The Way of the World* portrays the historical context within which the *Bildungsroman* has become a literary device to novelize anti-aristocratic, individualistic rights of modern subject/citizen. Through a comparative study of the genre, Moretti illuminates the genre's econo-political histories whose changes have incessantly yet

fatally influenced the structure of the genre. In explaining the birth of the *Bildungsroman*, Moretti points to the phenomenon of social mobility, an important function of rights of modern subject/citizen and a quintessential product of bourgeois capitalism. In the Morettian paradigm, the *Bildungsroman* at large is “the symbolic form of modernity” in the sense that the genre crystallizes a youthful, revolting dynamism of modern capitalist society that allows individuals to pursue an unprecedented mobility:

[W]hen status (or “traditional”) society starts to collapse, the countryside is abandoned for the city, and the world of work changes at an incredible and incessant pace, the colourless and uneventful socialization of ‘old’ youth becomes increasingly implausible: it becomes a problem, one that makes youth itself problematic. Already in Meister’s case, ‘apprenticeship’ is no longer the slow and predictable progress towards one’s father’s work, but rather an uncertain exploration of social space, which the nineteenth century—through travel and adventure, wandering and getting lost, ‘Bohême’ and ‘parvenir’—will underline countless times. (4)

Moretti’s explanation of the genre’s origin is helpful to understand the “possessive” assumptions of the genre. While favoring youth, unpredictable and unprecedented change, and future over senility, generational continuity, and past, the newly emerged genre of the novel in essence valorizes the concept of break and legitimates a “possessive individual” whose development and maturity would solely rely on the relationship between the bourgeois capitalist market and oneself, instead of on the generational connection the person has to “one’s father.”

The history of “possessive individualism,” going back to Hobbesian and Lockean political theory of the seventeenth-century European liberal thought, is older than the history of the *Bildungsroman*. The history of the political theory has been well documented by various scholars. One of the most renowned critics of possessive individualism is C. B. Macpherson whose work, *The Political Theory of Possessive*

Individualism: Hobbes to Locke published in 1962, investigates the possessive assumptions of the modern liberal-democratic state. Macpherson's thesis is, firstly, the emergence of the modern liberal-democratic state in the seventeenth century resulted from the needs of the new market society. According to Macpherson, Hobbes and Locke are the two chief philosophers who theorize the state, and one must carefully study a "possessive quality" in order to understand the natures of the modern liberal-democratic state. A possessive individual and a possessive market society, Macpherson writes, are the models of the liberal individual and the modern liberal-democratic state. At the outset of his text Macpherson talks about this "possessive quality" at length:

[The] possessive quality [of modern liberal-democratic theory] is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself. The relation of ownership, having become for more and more men the critically important relation determining their actual freedom and actual prospect of realizing their full potentialities, was read back into the nature of the individual. The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession. Society becomes a lot of free equal individuals related to each other as proprietors of their own capacities and of what they have acquired by their exercise. Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange. (3)

In short, possessive individualism, bearing a strong resemblance to economic liberalism and liberal capitalism, conceives an individual as a sole owner of his body and its "capacities" (i.e. labor, abilities, and properties). In the theory, collective institutions—such as the nation-state—are merely conceived as a passive protector, rather than an active generator, of individuals' capacities.

The resemblance between the Morettian *Bildungsroman* protagonist and the Macphersonian possessive individual is obvious. Moreover, both presume an idealized, raceless and classless society where there is no restriction of birth whether it be hereditary burden or inherited privileges. The rise of industrial capitalism engendered a market society equipped with varied technologies, and the new age allowed the modern “rights” subject a journey (either physical or symbolic) through which s/he could accomplish an individuation while socializing oneself within a newly given world. The conventional *Bildungsroman* protagonist as a “proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them” surprisingly resembles an American cultural identity, another historical product of the tension between aristocracy and democracy; the *Bildungsroman* and the idealized Americanness both tend to favor autonomous individuality over restrictions of birth.

In the context of the aforementioned discussions, *Contesting Americanness in the Contemporary Asian American Bildungsroman* invokes the interconnection between the particular literary genre and the American democratic ideals. I have to emphasize that it is, however, not to draw attention away from the fact that not all American subjects have been equally exposed to the American ideals. As the history of the United States evidently shows, this country was originally formed by forward-looking immigrants rejecting European ancestral hierarchies, and since then, American people have constantly had to fight in order not to fall back on myths of hereditary determinism. In particular, in this country whose occupants—either natives or immigrants—are of such heterogeneous descent, race as a marker of social identity has served as a means through which American people have constantly re-invented essentialist—and, consequently,

culturalist—ideas of the Others, including blacks, Native Americans, Mexicans, and Asians. In particular, the U.S. history of Asian immigration exclusion acts demonstrates how this country had restricted the possibilities of Asian American settlement by excluding them precisely based on race during the exclusion era (from the nineteenth century to 1965)¹. Suffice to say that the legislative exclusion of Asians had further interrupted an Asian American self-invention and socio-economic advancement in this country.

Due to the U.S. histories of racial exclusions, the American national character is often defined by the interaction—as well as the contradiction—between the polemic attitudes (the rights and freedoms to self-invent vs. the restrictions of structured racial hierarchies). A renowned critic Werner Sollors, for instance, uses the terms, *consent* and *descent*, in thematizing the contradiction of American identity, ideology, and culture. The critic elaborates, “the conflict between contractual and hereditary, self-made and ancestral, definitions of American identity—between *consent* and *descent*—(is) the central drama in American culture,” and he further points out that it is American people’s

¹ Changing its form ceaselessly, immigration exclusion acts were central to the U.S. regulation of Asian American subjectivity—the Page Act of 1875 (classifying Asians as “undesirable”) the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the Gentlemen’s Agreement in 1906 (U.S.-Japan ceasing passports to laborers from Japan), the Asiatic Barred Zone Act in 1917 (excluding Asian Indians), the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924 (prohibiting immigrations of East Asians and Indians), and the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934 (excluding Filipinos). By the mid-twentieth century, we started observing a series of immigrant repeal acts which drastically changed the status of Asian immigrations. Immigration repeal acts include: the Magnuson Act of 1943 (repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act), the McCarram-Walter Act of 1952 (repeal of the Naturalization Act of 1790), and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, which finally abolished “national origins” as basis for allocating immigration quotas, and thus Asian countries were placed on equal footing.

incessant struggles to mediate the conflict between *consent* and *descent* that has advanced American democratic ideals and their extensions:

Descent relations are those defined by anthropologists as relations of “substance” (by blood or nature); consent relations describe those of “law” or “marriage.” Descent language emphasizes our positions as heirs, our hereditary qualities, liabilities, and entitlements; consent language stresses our abilities as mature free agents and “architects of our fates” to choose our spouses, our destinies, and our political systems. (6)

I argue the *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre, too, is not only structured by the dynamic between *consent* and *descent* relations, but it also generates a reconciliation of the two.

The *Bildungsroman* is grounded in an idealized, anti-aristocratic, liberal world that prioritizes *consent* over *descent* relations; in essence, the genre depicts a subject/citizen self-assured of his/her becoming part of a given society (Moretti 16). Nonetheless, Asian American history demonstrates an antithesis of the genre’s promising assumptions. The history of Asian exclusions manifests the over-determining power of *descent* relations over *consent* relations. As the history of race-based exclusion acts shows, the racial group’s being “Asian” in itself restricted their “abilities as mature free agents” to choose their spouses, destinies, and political systems (Sollors 6). The formal structure of the *Bildungsroman* thus allows us to better observe the contradiction of idealized Americanness; the arduous struggle between the seemingly incompatible forces (*consent* vs. *descent*) is the very catalyst of the genre, the birth of modern subject/citizen, and the American cultural identity. That is why the genre has been much utilized by American writers of Asian descent in order to advocate, and challenge, American democratic ideals. The *Bildungsroman* provides Asian American writers who have experienced the restrictions of race relations with the axis of analysis. For the genre is designed to explore the impact of the *descent* relations upon an Asian American creation of *consent* relations.

The texts that I examine in this dissertation—Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone* (1994), Eric Liu’s *The Accidental Asian* (1998), Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging* (1997), and Amy Chua’s *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011)—all contain the narrative of subject formation, despite the supposed genre diversity. By focusing on the new watershed moment in the history of the *Bildungsroman*, I aim to trace the textual contestation of the conflict between *consent* and *descent* relations in the contemporary Asian American texts, whether novelistic or (auto)biographical in form. This study will carefully examine questions as follow: What kind of distinctive “conflict” exists in the Asian American narrative of *Bildung*? How do race, class, and locality diversify the kinds of conflict? How do the Asian American texts re-define the liberties and limits of the “individual”? What constitutes “society” in the Asian American *Bildungsromane*? How is “society” (family, community, the nation-state, and the relationships amongst them) represented by Asian American writers? After all, what kind of “reconciliation” do we see there? If the narrative seems to *fail* to achieve a resolution, what does it signify?

Since the enactment of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 which abolished the national origins quota system, the majority of Asian have been not only naturalized but born as citizens in this country. Accordingly, more and more people, including Asian Americans, have come to believe American democratic ideals are significantly improved as this nation has become more inclusive towards Americans of Asian descent. Sollors’ study, written particularly in reaction to the ethnic studies of the 1960s-70s, definitely projects a positive image of an inclusive American nation for the critic above all believes the possibilities of *consent* relations outweigh the restrictions of *descent* relations. David Hollinger pushes Sollors’ point even further by introducing the concept of

“postethnicity,” and Hollinger aggressively advocates the possibilities of making free choices in the contemporary America. If race was only one aspect of “ethnicity” to Sollors, Hollinger boldly asks his readers to stop using the category inasmuch as race discourages “postethnic” affiliations on the basis of fixed descent. Hollinger unhesitatingly attests that we are free to decide who we are, whom we marry, and with whom we create new communities, regardless of our race and ethnicity. Sollors’ and Hollinger’s views of identity formation shore up the universal assumptions of the *Bildungsroman* whose protagonist, in a conventional and theoretical sense, makes a free individual choice (or, at least the protagonist believes so, even though he/she comes to internalize the societal demands as his/her own).

Nonetheless, when the possibilities of “consent relations” (Sollors) and “voluntary affiliations” (Hollinger) are over-emphasized, we tend to forget the presence of race relations and their active, restrictive influences upon individuals’ decision makings. My study questions if Sollors’ and Hollinger’s hopeful presumptions truly match the reality. It examines how the literary genre, negotiating the ongoing conflict between *consent* (American democratic ideals) and *descent* (biological and cultural racisms) relations, represents the status of Asian Americans in the era of *de jure* inclusion. I have to emphasize, the protagonists in the Contemporary Asian American *Bildungsromane* this dissertation examines did not directly experience immigrant exclusion acts. But the history of Asian exclusion, not only *legislative* but also *social*, still has an impact on contemporary Asian Americans’ decision making and their social conditions in the U.S. Using the lens of the *Bildungsroman*, this dissertation examines how the elements of *descent* relations (such as race, ethnicity, and even class of the protagonist’s parents)

actively influence the process of one's self-invention and socio-economic advancement. It also examines the ways in which the Asian American *Bildungsroman* revises the notion of Americanness and, in turn, interrogates how the literary tradition generates alternative images of Americanness. Furthermore, my aim is also to address a discursive connection between sociopolitical and formal analyses by focusing on a conventionalized literary genre as the contested site for transforming an Asian American politics of form. Hence, this dissertation also focuses on how the renowned and emergent Asian American writers deploy, revise, and manipulate the generic structure of the *Bildungsroman* in order to create political impacts through the writerly acts.

The Asian American writers' formal expressions particularize the conventional genre's dynamic between *consent* and *descent* relations as their *Bildungsromane* specifically interrogate the binary of "Asian" and "American." As critics of Asian American studies have pointed out, the U.S. nation-state has constructed "Asian" and "American" as mutually exclusive (Lowe 4; Chu 98; Palumbo-Liu 213-16). Consequently, the Asian American writers inscribe the racial group's struggles to challenge the national construction of the group's image as outsiders, sojourners, strangers, or "foreigner-within" at best, over against a normative citizen. One must bear in mind, the legislative history of prohibiting Asians from becoming naturalized not only signifies the *legal* ostracization of Asians but also reflects a more deep-seated American mentality in which Asians and Asian Americans have been excluded economically, culturally, and politically, even after the repeal of the Asian exclusion acts. In the Asian American *Bidlungsromane* this dissertation examines, for instance, Asian Americans are represented as an "immigrant" in a "bachelor society," a "model minority," a "leper," or a

“tiger mom,” all of which—despite the class difference—continuously demonstrates an antithesis to American democratic ideals, normative citizenship, and individual sovereignty. These more or less relatively contemporary Asian stereotypes have a long history whose initial representation, known as the “yellow peril,” dates back to as early as the fifth century B.C.E. (Okihiro 119). Asian stereotypes have constantly changed their particular forms, and some of them—such as “model minority” and its most recent counterpart “tiger mom”—are deemed arguably positive, benign, or complementary images of Asian Americans. While epitomizing a role model for success, these two particular “positive” stereotypes (especially “model minority”) have recently been provided to the American public to be inspired. However, as Asian American scholars including Gary Y. Okihiro and David Palumbo-Liu have cogently pointed out, these seemingly positive stereotypes re-marginalize Asian Americans rather than truly deconstruct the binary of “Asian” and “American.” These “positive” Asian stereotypes are incisively grounded in compatible cultural norms, such as WASPy work ethics, therefore reinforce the binary of “Asian” and “American” by re-positioning them as antipodes (Okihiro 139-147; David Palumbo-Liu 213-16).

Grounded in the perpetual image of Asia(n) as the Other, the Asian American *Bildungsroman* thus strives to at once expose and interrupt the historical binary of “Asian” and “American” of a particular given time. Due to the historical context, the *Bildungsroman* in the Asian American literary and cultural studies has received due critical attention in recent years. Lisa Lowe in *Immigrant Act* elegantly captures an ideological function of the traditional narrative form: “The novel of formation . . . (is) a narrative of the individual’s relinquishing of particularity and difference through

identification with an idealized “national” form of subjectivity” (98). By highlighting the role of the nation-state as a particular form of society for the contemporary *Bildungsroman*, Lowe points to the genre’s conservative value. In reaction to the genre’s conventional ideological function, Patricia Chu adds, Asian American writers rather actively re-inscribe their “particularity and difference” in an alternative version of the genre (3). Lowe’s and Chua’s conceptualizations of the genre illuminate the ambivalence of the narrative form: its dual potentials to serve as a vehicle to either accommodate or challenge the contradiction of American democracy erased in the conventional *Bildungsroman*. Similarly, the Asian American *Bildungsroman* has revolved around a catalogue of the American stereotypes of Asian otherness, and Asian American writers actively seek to manipulate and reinvent societal conceptions of Asian Americans.

Building on Lowe’s and Chu’s studies, I argue the significance of the Asian American *Bildungsroman* is at once its interrogation of the contradiction within the American ideals and its construction of Asian American subjecthood. Since their socio-political conditions are different, they had to transform the conventional *Bidlungsroman*, which in turn creates various versions of the genre. In order to achieve their two major tasks, the Asian American writers this dissertation examines—all of whom were born in this country—have to, firstly, examine the contradictory, unreconciled interplay of *consent* and *descent*, which not only determines the structure of the literary world they utilize (the Asian American *Bildungsroman*) but also defines the rhetoric of the socio-political ground on which their physical bodies stand (the U.S. nation-state). As seen in the legislative Asian exclusion and American stereotypes of Asian otherness, race—as an epitomized indicator of *descent* relations—has been used to promulgate the constructed

incompatibility of “Asian” and “American.” So much so the writers, secondly, address the particular binary of “Asian” and “American,” which then becomes a unique formal dynamic of their *Bildungsromane*. Moreover, the Asian American writers also strive to render the binary opposition coexistent against the national rendering of “Asian” and “American” mutually exclusive. This central task—the construction of at once “Asian” “American” subjects—accomplished by the Asian American *Bildungsromane*, truly signifies their unique modern socialization. To highlight the ways in which the writers’ texts both foreground and resist the binary, I analyze how the literary texts engage with experiences particular to Asian Americans, including the history of Asian immigrant acts, the cultural history of Orientalism, the leprosy settlement of Japanese Hawaiians, and Asian racial/cultural stereotypes.

I further argue, the writers, lastly, add more complexity and distinctiveness to their *Bidlung* narratives while addressing the allied relation between the nation-state and family as mutual constraints in their protagonists’ pursuit of liberal democratic subjecthood. Along with the national mentality that alienates the Asian American protagonists from American democratic ideals, their Asian families—more specifically, the protagonists’ first-generation parents—also tend to distance them from individual sovereignty. For the first-generation parents represent another contested site that generates its regulatory demands. An Asian American modern socialization does not merely signify becoming a legitimate subject/citizen of the nation-state whose basic rights are protected by the U. S. Constitution. For Asian Americans, becoming an adult should also imply that the subject/citizen concedes to be an official member of one’s community by adapting oneself to one’s ancestral culture, customs, and histories. The

conflict in the Asian American *Bildungsroman* thus tends to be twofold in the sense that the conflict is created not only between a protagonist and his/her microcosm (family), but also between the protagonist and “society” at large (nation-state). This in turn renders the protagonists caught in a dual instability. This formal uniqueness is caused by the fact that an Asian American protagonist is interpellated by multiple social organizations. On the one hand, the subject is urged to assimilate into an idealized American society that highly values democratic individualism, in order to claim political and social agency. On the other hand, the subject is also hailed by his/her family of Asian descent, whose history is often at odds with the promised liberty of the nation-state.

In my selection of the Asian American *Bildungsromane*, the family’s regulatory demands are by and large represented as the consequence of the U.S. exclusion of Asian Americans. The first- and second-generation parents’ socio-economic insecurity creates a set of constraints for the youth, and specific examples include responsibilities and duties to take care for the dispossessed parents (in Ng’s and Yamanaka’s texts), desires to fully assimilate into “white” mainstream culture (Liu), and an authoritative parenting (Chua). In addition, the families’ regulatory demands are often further intensified by the logics of Asian American families: patriarchal/matriarchal authorities and Confucian ideologies. I am not, however, suggesting that the Asian American *Bildungsroman* shore up the binary of “tradition” and “modernity.” My point is quite the opposite: the Asian American *Bildungsroman* challenges such binary opposition in that an Asian American “family” often functions as an active site where the binary of tradition and modernity collapses, and ancestral culture and the nation-state converge. The Asian American *Bildungsromane* all expose another conflict between the first-generation parents and the nation-state

through the mouth of the second-generation protagonists. By re-rewriting the *Bildungsromane* of the first-generation parents, Ng, Liu, Yamanaka, and Chua demonstrate that the American family of Asian descent is the contested site where regulatory demands of family and the nation-state converge. Consequently, the *Bildungsromane* highlight that the subject formation of the Asian American youth is incisively involved with a multigenerational mobility, rather than a possessive individual mobility presumed in the conventional *Bildungsroman*. As the youth retells the stories of their parents as a crucial part of his/her own *Bildung* narrative, it allows the conflict between the parents and the U.S. nation-state to be resolved, which would have remained unreconciled otherwise. So much so, the protagonist's task is to achieve a reconciliation between the multi-generational family—including himself/herself—and the nation-state, rather than between he/she as a “proprietor of his own person” and society (Macpherson 3).

Hence, this study takes a close look at the triangular relationships—amongst the protagonist, his/her family, the nation-state—that the Asian American *Bildungsromane* unanimously shore up. In my reading of the Asian-American coming-of-age narratives, the nation-state is rendered as an ambivalent social world for the protagonists in that the nation-state at once promulgates and nullifies the promises of autonomous selfhood and liberal democracy, whose contradictions are incisively marked on the protagonists' family histories. Especially Ng's and Yamanaka's *Bildungsromane*—whose protagonists were born to the working-class immigrant family—question the probability of a Morettian “harmonious” development of subject through a smooth resolution of conflict. Consequently, Ng's and Yamanaka's protagonists situated within the residue of earlier

histories of their predecessors strive to invent an alternative reconciliation; as I will elaborate in more detail in the following chapters, the resolution the two particular protagonists come to reach in the end is gained through not only remembering the old but also asserting a communal survival, which contrasts with the classical European *Bildungsroman*'s foregrounding belief in possessive individualism.

The narrative form of the *Bildungsroman*, designed to seek a reconciliation between particularization and socialization, truly fits for Asian American writers' observing, and reconciling, national conflicts (between *descent* and *consent*; "Asian" and "American"; family of Asian descent and the American nation-state) and their protagonists' personal struggles to negotiate the histories of their family with the idealized claims of the U.S. nation-state. While conventionally narrating the development of an individual's harmonious integration into society at large, the narrative form allows the Asian American writers to not only acknowledge the imperative for modern socialization—liberal democratic freedoms and rights—but also seek to actualize the democratic ideals implicated in the proclaimed national ethos.

Historically speaking the term *Bildungsroman* refers to a new kind of novel that emerged and was embraced by the leading prose writers of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Germany after the appearance of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Although it has been debated as to who initially conceptualized the genre, scholars often cite Wilhelm Dilthey's work and regard it as a classical German definition of the genre. In G. B. Tennyson's translation, Dilthey's definition of the *Bildungsroman* reads:

[The *Bildungsroman*] examines a regular course of development in the life of the individual; each of its stages has its own value and each is at the same time the basis

of a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary transit points of the individual on his way to maturity and harmony. And the “highest happiness of humankind” is the development of the person as the unifying, substantial form of human existence. (136)

As Dilthey’s definition implies, the *Bildungsroman* in a conventional sense, deeply grounded in the European idealist tradition of humanist optimism in the eighteenth century, embodies a classical Enlightenment concept of *Bildung*. Similarly, James Hardin remarks *Bildung* in an eighteenth-century context is a verbal noun meaning “formation,” while in an early-nineteenth-century context the term implies “cultivation.” The formation refers to a development of the personality as a whole, and the cultivation rather means a refinement of an individual in a broader, humanistic sense than an education merely with institutional connotations. Noting that the *Bildungsroman* and *Bildung* alike have become contested terms whose precise definitions are hard to pinpoint within the tradition of German Classicism, Hardin suggests an “expanded, ahistorical” definition of the genre: “the term *Bildung* as it applies to the novel could be used in a broad sense linking it to the intellectual and social development of a central figure who, after going out into the world and experiencing both defeats and triumphs, comes to a better understanding of self and to a generally affirmative view of the world” (xiii). Interestingly, the traditional meanings of *Bildung*—whether German classical or ahistorical—are more or less devoid of material (or rather, monetary) connotations, which separates itself from some English and (Asian) American versions of *Bildung*. The classical, humanistic interpretations of *Bildung* (education broader than schooling) and the emphasis on compromise (protagonist’s getting an “affirmative view of the world” as a resolution of the structural conflict) are also critical in Moretti’s conceptualization of the “classical” *Bildungsroman*. Dilthey’s and Hardin’s definitions of the genre together

project a teleological, linear narrative through which a modern bourgeois individual— unquestionably Euro- and andro-centric—develops from an innocent, restless youth to a civilized, mature adult. In comparison with other types of novels, the conventional *Bildungsroman*, thus, could be understood as a bourgeois version of quest narrative similar to the epic; more to the point, the newly emerged genre is predicated on a certain narrative trajectory still governed by the belief in the organic cohesiveness *in*, if not between, society and self. Building on the foundation of the study of the genre, my study demonstrates how the Asian American *Bildungsroman* shapes the tradition of the genre anew, by highlighting the historical conflict between the protagonists’ twofold society: family and the nation-state.

In order to highlight how Asian American writers contest formal and thematic transformations of the genre *within* and *beyond* the conventional *Bildungsroman*, let me examine Moretti’s categorization of the genre and his understanding of *Bildung* in more detail. According to Moretti, “the classical *Bildungsroman*” above all captures modern socialization whereby an individual at once achieves an harmonious fusion of “following one’s own conviction” (individuation) and “giving oneself to authority” (socialization) (59). To the critic Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* and Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* belong to the category in that the texts’ protagonists are able to provide an epitomized example of such a fusion. As Moretti puts it, in the world of the classical *Bildungsroman* “[s]elf-development and integration are complementary and convergent trajectories,” and it is the achievement of this compromise that constitutes “maturity” (18-19). Moretti also emphasizes a pre-capitalist or non-capitalist aspect of the classical *Bildungsroman* by explaining the incompatibility of capitalist rationality and *Bildung*, or of modernity and

Bildung, which makes his method quintessentially—yet immutably—modernist (5). Moretti writes, “Only if the individual renounces the bourgeois who dwells within him will he be able to become an harmonious entity: to be ‘full and happy’ ” (32). He even compares the *Bildungsroman* hero to a merchant in order to illuminate the irreconcilable relation between “maturity” (which is one of the most celebrated elements of the genre) and “capital”: “Capitalist rationality cannot generate *Bildung*,” Moretti writes, in the sense that the greed for money must grow without stopping and therefore “[a merchant] will never know the quiet happiness of ‘belonging’ to a fixed place” (26). As the quote implies, Moretti’s understanding of *Bildung* is enclosed since he argues it ought to be “concluded” as the narrative ends (26). Furthermore, I wanted to point out it is also akin to that of the traditional German scholars, both of which in effect generate only a particular felicity based on the binary of humanistic, intelligent, spiritual growth and material, economic success. Suffice it to say that setting up this binary is central to his conclusion that the *Bildungsroman* at the end of nineteenth century had come to an end (228).

As capitalism evolved, Moretti goes on to argue, by the mid-nineteenth century individuation and socialization became no longer complementary but incompatible processes, and the emergence of “the new *Bildungsroman*” with different structures bears witness to such an historical change. The new *Bildungsromane* such as Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black* and Balzac’s *Sentimental Education* show how the world changed so that the achievement of *Bildung* (which means, a *certain* kind of *Bildung*) as well as of the harmonious fusion of socialization and individuation became nearly impossible. In a mature capitalist society, an individual became “a fashionable commodity: discovered,

put on the market, triumphant, out of style, thrown away,” in Moretti’s words, and the meaning of success is, or *ought to be*, questioned by the protagonists as money became a universal mediation of urban success (134). Although “success” and “maturity” are both suggested as ways through which a protagonist achieves *Bildung*, it is clear that they contrast in the critic’s paradigm, precisely because “success” based on an ambiguous nature of bourgeois greed implies a sense of “opportunism,” which “consists in betraying certain values in order to succeed” (84-85). To clarify, being “successful” in capitalist society is often involved with money and therefore tantamount to yielding oneself to greed and injustice: “For success,” Moretti contends, “is the product of a brilliantly dynamic, but never entirely ‘just’ reality” (84). Therefore, the protagonists in the new *Bildungsromane* are to partake in “a sort of personal campaign” rather than a harmonious journey that will lead to one’s compromise with the bourgeois society: “another symptomatic overturning of the classical *Bildungsroman*, the individual’s formation (in the new *Bildungsroman*) is not identified here with the hero’s insertion within the rules of society, but with his attempt to undermine them” (106). As a result, there is the lack of felicity; the new *Bildungsroman* ends with an “unhappy ending.” Meanwhile, “the English *Bildungsroman*”—such as Dickens’ *Great Expectations* and Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*—worsened the symptoms as it totally eliminated the magnetic poles between the hero and the world; in such a world could there be neither “compromise” (as in the classical *Bildungsroman*) nor “unresolved contradiction” (the new *Bildungsroman*). The problem here is that there is no conflict between the individual and the world given, which is a crucial element of both the classical and new *Bildungsroman*, and therefore an individual is presented as simply part of the whole from the very beginning.

In the contemporary Asian American narratives, the meaning of *Bildung* encompasses not only the cultivation of one's intellect and sensibility but also the achievement of material, societal success. The history and evolution of the genre demonstrate that one's moral, spiritual, and psychological maturation is often achieved through his/her social and economic advancement. This is not surprising given the historical context of the genre's arrival. As a sub-genre of the novel emerged as a favored companion of the rising middle-class reading public and a product of growing bourgeois capitalism of the eighteenth-century Europe, the *Bildungsroman* not only captures the individual's desire for upward mobility in the wake of industrial capitalist modernity more precisely than any other kinds of the novel, but also shows the middle-class public how to accomplish the desire. All in all, the *Bildungsroman* is by and large predicated on the three major beliefs of the period that emerged simultaneously with the birth of the genre: bourgeois humanism, liberalism, and possessive individualism, all of which universally concede an individual's freedom to exert one's will and to pursue his/her potentialities, rights, and ownerships. Although the pattern of "social and economic advancement" could be varied depending on the time, culture, and soil of each text, it is hard to deny "[c]ertain material conditions were presumed to be prerequisites for the expansion of sensibility and intellect," as Patricia Alden acutely points out (2). For instance, while early German examples often show protagonists' assimilation to a higher class, such as an aristocratic or a genteel elite, Asian American variations are commonly obsessed with the concept of the "American Dream," which is an American version of "social and economic advancement" particularly in the context of the immigrant narrative. My conceptualization of the history of the genre and of the term *Bildung* does

not intend to posit two meanings of “social mobility”—a moral, psychological, intellectual mobility through a humanistic inner cultivation vs. an economic mobility through an achievement of a right vocation and material wealth—as separate from each other. As the term “upward mobility” broadly implies, one’s desire to rise could not be explained solely by either the former or the latter meaning of social mobility. Nor it would be harmoniously achieved by focusing on an exclusive either. As opposed to Moretti’s binary of the humanistic (*Bildung*) and the economic (“success”), my reading of the Asian American *Bildungsroman* demonstrates class is actually at the center of the genre’s narrative trajectory, encompassing both inner cultivation and economic success.

My selection of the Asian American *Bildungsromane* represents *Bildung* above all as the Asian American subject/citizen’s will to claim freedoms and rights to *choose*. The language of choice characterized as “contractual and volitional, not natural and perpetual,” according to James H. Kettner, is quintessential to the principles of American citizenship, and thus epitomizes an American version of claiming one’s freedoms and rights (10). Suffice it to say that the language of choice represents a condition of not only one’s political maturation but also social, economic advancement. The literary tradition’s obsession with the narrative of choice reflects Asian American cultures and histories which have more or less hindered their “possessive” individualization; while the nation-state has been restricting the racial group’s rights of life, liberty, and property through the legislative exclusion, Asian American families bearing the political, social, and economic exclusions have unwittingly denied their youth individualistic freedoms and rights. All of the protagonists in my texts—Leila, Eric, Ivah, Sophia and Lulu—actively deploy the choice narrative in order to fight at once national and familial constraints, and their

maturity is accomplished through the ways in which the characters (dis)claim their abilities to choose their spouse, future education, and occupation. The manners in which my protagonists exert their will to claim freedoms and rights to choose precisely exemplify Joseph R. Slaughter's formulation that "[t]he idealist *Bildungsroman* provides symbolic legitimation for human rights' narrative of becoming what one already is by right" (136). The hyphenated subject/citizen's claiming of the consent language in the *Bildungsromane* becomes political in that the act of claiming signals both the potentiality and the actualization of their rights to choose. In other words, although the rights are supposedly presumed, their rights come into effective through the very act of writing: "These novelistic declarations of rights," Slaughter goes on to say, "assert to their protagonists the positive rights of the citizen that ostensibly already belong to them by natural right; that is, the *Bildungsroman*, explicitly or implicitly, narrates "a right to have rights" (137). The claiming of "the positive rights of the (Asian American) citizen" is truly imperative, provided that the double constraints—the nation-state's legislative and social exclusion and its consequences in families—have denied the Asian American subject's rights to self-invent.

The freedoms and rights to choose as a quintessentially Asian American adaptation of *Bildung* is of course predicated on a particular kind of American individualism, which is originated from possessive individualism, presuming an individual owing nothing to his/her family, community, and nation-state, and remaining free to make any choice (Macpherson 3). In this light, the meaning of possession in the context of Asian American subjectivities encompasses more than a possession of properties exterior to one's self. In order to exert one's free will (to choose or own), an

individual above all must own him/herself, and this self-possession is the one that clearly marks his/her subjectivity. To be sure, one cannot fully exert one's capacities without the sense of self-possession. In my reading of the Asian American *Bildungsromane*, some texts (such as Ng's and Yamanaka's) present a dispossessed family as a structural condition of the protagonist's social world, which happens to disregard the protagonist's right of self-possession due to the family's need for economic and psychological support. Meanwhile, the other texts (Liu's and Chua's) seem to more or less demonstrate possessive individualism as simply inherited from one generation to the next, thanks to their privileged class position. In particular, in my reading of the *Asian American Bildungsromane*, Liu's *The Accidental Asian* offers an Asian American achievement of possessive individualism through the model of assimilation. In both groups, however, the development of the choice narrative is driven by an imperative to break from the old family and a desire to self-fashion one's future. Especially in case of Lulu's subject formation in *Battle Hymn*, Chua's excessive interventions, though economically supportive, become an onerous burden that ironically denies the youth the right of self-possession. Consequently, possessive individualism, which constitutes the ideals of American liberal democracy, becomes an objective of the Asian American *Bildungsromane*, not a condition as seen in the Morettian classical *Bildungsroman*. This unique characteristic is not surprising in that there is the lack of possessive individualism in the history of Asian American subjecthood. In this context, my reading of the Asian American *Bildungsromane* aim to mark both the return of the repressed of, and the attainment of, possessive individualism and liberal democracy. I believe that the Asian American writers' negotiations with the conventions of the highly popular literary genre

attest a transformative Asian American politics of form. Provided that the Asian American *Bildungsromane* especially focus on declarations of freedoms and rights to choose, I investigate how the act of claiming “the positive rights of the citizen that ostensibly already belong to them by natural right” in the Asian American *Bildungsromane* contests the disjunctions between the ideals and the reality (Slaughter 137).

Before I jump to chapter descriptions, I would like to explain my rationale for including two autobiographies—Liu’s *The Accidental Asian* and Chua’s *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*—in examining the Asian American *Bildungsroman*. Since my work does not intend to exclusively focus on the genre of autobiography, I use the term “autobiography” by and large for the convenience of distinguishing Liu’s and Chua’s supposedly non-fictional, (auto)biographical writings from the novelistic texts. Nonetheless, I wanted to acknowledge that as scholars of autobiography have documented well, the genre needs its specific definition as it is frequently confused with other non-fictional literary forms that have an autobiographical contents—including memoir, reminiscence, diary, letter, etc. Especially, autobiography scholars note that the line between autobiography and memoir (or reminiscence) is harder to draw, although there is a definite, general difference between the two: “In the autobiography proper, attention is focused on the *self*, in the memoir or reminiscence on *others*” (Pascal 5; Emphasis mine). In case of Asian American autobiography, the line between autobiography and memoir becomes even more blurred. For Asian American autobiographers—like Asian American writers of the *Bildungsroman*—actively utilize familial relations in the construction of the self through writing an autobiography of two,

or three, generations. As a result, Asian American autobiography often contains both the stories of the *self* (autobiographer) and of the *others* (grandparents, parents, and/or children), as seen in Liu's and Chua's texts.

Although autobiography is much an older, let alone different, literary form than the novel, which has been around since the emergence of St. Augustine's *Confessions* (AD 397-8), there are quite a few similarities between autobiography and the *Bildungsroman*, which I found intriguing especially in the context of the Asian American narrative. As Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* points out, autobiography, like the *Bildungsroman*, is a quintessentially European narrative form (2). A hybrid of fiction and history, autobiography in essence is predicated on individualism in that the genre is generated by an autobiographer's desire to (re)present one's experience so that one can construct identity ("I") in the present by re-shaping the past. In particular, Pascal notes that individualism became a more remarkable characteristic of autobiography by the eighteenth century, as compared with the earlier "religious" autobiographies that owed the justification of the self to a common religious belief (51). And it is the very individualism that gave birth to the novel in the eighteenth-century of Europe, which has deployed an autobiographic narrative form and made it as one of the major novelistic narrative methods. Ian Watt, the most influential novel critic in the Anglo-American tradition, in *The Rise of the Novel* also shores up the legacy of autobiography in relation to the advent and development of the novel. According to Watt, the pattern of the (auto)biographical memoir is fundamental to novelistic narrations since the novel is grounded in, and displays, the conviction of "what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals" (27).

What I would like to further point out is the *Bildungsroman*, which is the genre of my focus, is the most loyal successor of autobiography. Through Pascal's definition of autobiography, one may conjecture that autobiography is a prototype of the *Bildungsroman*, both of which are based on the beliefs in individualism and liberalism, and designed to depict the harmoniously developmental fusion of individuation and socialization:

[Autobiography] involves the reconstruction of the movement of life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived. Its centre of interest is the self, not the outside world, though necessarily the outside world must appear so that, in give and take with it, the personality finds its peculiar shape . . . It imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story. It establishes certain stages in an individual life, makes links between them, and defines, implicitly or explicitly, a certain consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world. (9)

Like the *Bildungsroman* whose structure is expected to promisingly move from a conflict to a resolution in displaying the complex interaction of the self and society, autobiography in doing a similar task intends to "impose an order on chaos" by giving "a coherent shaping of the past" (Holte 3, Pascal 5). As James C. Holte in *The Ethnic I* notes, the two fundamental questions autobiography addresses in general are: "Who am I and how did I become what I am?" (3). In particular, according to Herbert Leibowitz whose work focuses on American autobiography, American autobiography has its own distinctive theme that has shaped American identity throughout history: a "quest for distinction," aided by the drive for success, the American Dream, the high ideals inscribed in the Constitution (xv-xxv). Similar to the narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman*, the formal characteristics of autobiography provide an imaginative site where the Asian American subjects envision how they could claim such ideals and dreams.

This is why the autobiographical writing has rivaled the traditional *Bildungsroman* from in the evolution of Asian American Literature. When Asian American Literature significantly developed over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, a large number of autobiographical, and semi-autobiographical, texts came out, gaining public attention. A couple renowned examples would include Carlos Bulosan's *America Is In the Heart* (1946) and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975), two of the most read and taught Asian American texts within and outside the academy. The phenomenon was by and large caused by the fact that the non-fiction genre (autobiography) generates the sovereign self by employing the first-person singular stance. Like its fictional counterpart (the *Bildungsroman*), autobiography allows a construction of the liberal subject in dialectical relation to the particular society in which (s)he inhabits. The literary tradition of Asian American Literature at large has strived to negotiate two modes of discourse: the Asian American subject's contrasting desires to be exceptional, distinctive from the umbrella stereotypes of Asian otherness and to be representative of the family and the community who were under the direct influences of the stereotypes as a racial minority. Both autobiography and the *Bildungsroman*, due to its generic structures, are best suited for the interests of Asian American writers.

While the texts I chose to discuss in this dissertation include diversity in terms of not only gender and locality but also class, I strategically use class to order the chapters in creating my arguments. Ng's *Bone* and Liu's *The Accidental Asian* both utilize the narrative of marriage, so that I locate Liu's text after Ng's. Although both Leila (*Bone*'s protagonist) and Liu (*The Accidental Asian*) put forth "a marriage of choice," Leila's self-fashioning of her *Bildung* is very much different from Liu's manner. Not only did Leila

voluntarily choose to marry someone who shares the same class and ethnic backgrounds, but her narrative of *Bildung*—which I categorize as a *communal Bildungsroman*—also denies a Morettian clean break from the old, and instead reclaims the legislative history of Asian exclusions through the stories of her non-biological Chinese ancestors. Leila’s denial of the Western possessive individualism (which is at the center of the conventional *Bildungsroman*) and her voluntary affiliation with the Chinatown community contrast Liu’s self-assured affirmation of his rights to interracial marriage and the consumption and possession of “white” American bourgeois mainstream culture. Meanwhile, by putting Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging* and Chua’s *Battle Hymn* one after the other, I aim to interrogate, and compare, the two texts that both focus on Asian American child development and education. While *Blu’s Hanging*’s protagonist, Ivah, is situated in a materially dispossessed, mother-less family, the stories of *Battle Hymn*’s two main protagonists are not only grounded in the economic support of Amy Chua but also vicariously composed by the “tiger mom.”

To elaborate on each chapter in detail, Chapter II examines Ng’s first novel, *Bone*, that begins with the protagonist’s confession that she just got married: “I wanted a *marriage of choice*. I wanted this marriage to be for me” (18 Emphasis mine). *Bone*’s narrative seems to be derived from the protagonist’s individualistic desire to be independent from her old family; however, the story becomes anti-individualistic as it simultaneously unfolds a subtext concerning her stepfather, Leon, who migrated to the U.S. as a “paper son” of an early Chinese migrant worker, Grandpa Leong. Projecting double narratives of the two parallel protagonists, *Bone* thus puts a fictive, “paper” relation forward as part of the determining structure of the *communal Bildungsroman*. By

deploying the non-biological family relations (“stepdaughter” and “paper son”), Ng’s *Bildungsroman* ironically pinpoints a compulsory possession of the remainings of the U.S. production of race relations—in this case, the aftermath of the legislative exclusion of Asian immigrants—rather than a clean break from the repressive past. While displaying the influences of her stepfather’s hidden history upon the later generation’s individualization, Ng sheds light on Lisa Lowe’s critique of the contradictory interplay between the U.S. nation-state and Asia(n America). Lowe in the article, “Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique,” attests Asia is a contested site where the nation-state resolves capitalist contradiction through the racialization of citizenship (i.e. immigration exclusion laws and repeal acts) and the exploitation of racialized labor. In Lowe’s poststructuralist paradigm, the U.S. nation-state has promulgated the myth of ideal liberalism and of abstract citizenship by at once depending on and disavowing racialized differences: “In the last century and a half, the American *citizen* has been defined over against the Asian *immigrant*, legally, economically, and culturally” (4). *Bone*’s two other protagonists—bachelor Grandpa Leong and his “paper son” Leon—as “Asian *immigrant(s)*” are not encompassed within the abstract citizen vis-à-vis possessive individual, and therefore expose the ostensibility of the universalizing concepts (the abstract citizen, the possessive individual, liberalism) both the U.S. nation-state and the classical *Bildungsroman* ideally envision.

In order to highlight the distinctiveness of Ng’s generic interventions, I focus on the process in which Leila comes to terms with her coming-of-age as she becomes to self-assuredly and voluntarily position her identity as a “stepdaughter of a paper son” (Ng 61). Central to the narrative is Leila’s residing sense of indebtedness to the family and her

concern for communal survival, a unique feature hardly seen in the classical European *Bildungsroman*. As I shall examine throughout this dissertation, this sense of indebtedness to the family is ubiquitous in the Asian American *Bildungsroman*, regardless of the cultural background of an individual work; simultaneously it is incompatible with the model of “possessive individualism” presumed in the Western literary tradition of subject formation. In reading *Bone*, I aim to examine how the protagonist’s particular historical backgrounds diversify the conventional structure of the *Bildungsroman* and render the reconciliation painstaking. In so doing, I argue that Ng scripts a *communal Bildungsroman* by challenging the ideal national subject implied in both the classical *Bildungsroman* and the liberal nation-state.

In Chapter III I turn my gaze to a non-fictional text that contains an artistically harmonious development of *Bildung*: Liu’s *The Accidental Asian*. An autobiography written by a second-generation, upper-class Chinese American, *The Accidental Asian* is a prime example of the Asian American *assimilative Bildungsroman*. While Liu opens his autobiography with the story of the death of his Chinese father with a section entitled “Song for My Father,” he ends the narrative with “Blood Vows” where Liu recollects his marriage to a Jewish American woman, Carroll Haymon. Central to Liu’s generic transformation of the *Bildungsroman* is commingling the autobiographical narrative with one of grief memoir, a narrative strategy that emanates a progressive narrative of gradual, multigenerational assimilation. Liu’s *The Accidental Asian* in effect constructs an autobiographical identity as an outcome of the progression from the son of the Chinese immigrant family to the father figure of an American nuclear family. Liu’s symbolic gesture of disavowing his role as a son of the Chinese immigrant creates a striking

contrast to Leila's affirming the historical and generational continuities between the "stepdaughter" and the "paper son." While providing the chronological process of how the author has been successfully integrated into "white" bourgeois American society, Liu re-interprets *Bildung* mainly as assimilation. Liu's *Bildungsroman* is thus incisively structured by the dynamics of gaining and losing, remembering and forgetting, as well as a process of identification and that of disidentification. In particular, the incompatibility of "Americanness" and "Chineseness" is fundamental to Liu's self-invention as a "white" subject/citizen. In this case, the narrative of *Bildung* is grounded in the logic of dilution: as the narrative of *Bildung* is achieved, the presence of Liu's Chinese father is gradually dismissed and thoroughly substituted by Liu's envision of his new, chosen family with his "white" wife.

Accordingly, Liu's text, the only text free from the onerous sense of indebtedness, bears witness to an Asian American narrative achievement of possessive individualism. I examine how Liu in the *assimilative Bildungsroman* constructs an Asian American autobiographical identity as a democratic selfhood not only through the acquisition of "whiteness" but also through the loss of "Chineseness." To the upper-class Chinese American subject, becoming "white, by acclamation," was possible since such notions as whiteness and Chineseness alike hinge on cultural aspects, not on an essentialist notion of race (34). Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman* thus revises Lowe's paradigm of the contradictory interplay between possessive "American citizen" and disregarded "Asian immigrant," a critique by and large grounded in racial difference. Liu's exertion of his rights to interracial marriage and the consumption and possession of "whiteness" demonstrates that race is not the only component that has influenced the nation-state's

constructing, reinforcing, and revising its ideal citizenry. As scholars have pointed out, the national construction of “white(ness)” has evolved as the element of class comes into play. In particular, George Lipsitz interprets the term—“whiteness”—as a system that creates and restores the privileges of whites, rather than merely as a racial category itself. Mike Hill also claims a matter of skin should not be the yardstick of “whiteness” because what constitutes “whiteness” is not simply racial attributes but a complex mixture of one’s identity including class. In so doing, both Lipsitz and Hill evince that one can be included in, or excluded from, the *social* category of whiteness, based on one’s class background. The studies of whiteness certainly make the discourse of the Asian American *Bildungsroman* more exciting in that “whiteness” in the context of the American culture has arisen as one particular adaptation of a social and economic advancement that a subject/citizen yearns to achieve in order to rise. While describing the protagonist’s full integration into “whiteness,” Liu’s *The Accidental Asian* is compared to Ng’s and Yamanaka’s texts that voluntarily avow the underprivileged protagonists’ concerns for communal survival. This harmonious *Bildung* narrative through which Liu blissfully celebrates the birth of his autonomous, possessive-individualist self is not indeed allowed to lower-middle- or working-class immigrant subjects.

Chapter IV deals with Yamanaka’s *deconstructive Bildungsroman*, *Blu’s Hanging*. Set on the island of Moloka’i, Hawai’i, Yamanaka’s coming-of-age novel narrates a story of a 13-year-old girl, Ivah Ogata, whose poverty-stricken family recently lost their mother due to her overconsumption of the sulfone drug, a drug used to cure Hansen’s disease. Despite some similarities between Ng’s and Yamanaka’s *Bildungsromane* due to the protagonists’ gender and class, Yamanaka re-inscribes the

particularity of her Hawaiian protagonist by interrogating Asian American experiences and histories of leprosy settlement in Hawai'i. Throughout the text, Ivah in seeking her particular modern socialization thus struggles to negotiate her family's need for her to take on the role of surrogate mother and her willingness to be upwardly mobile (more specifically, to attend a college-prep school in Honolulu by leaving her ailing family). The protagonist's seeking a reconciliation appears to be onerous given the level of economic and psychological distress the Ogata family suffers. While utilizing the particular Asian American history of leprosy in Hawai'i that restricted the coming-of-age of Ivah's parents and then their successor, Yamanaka creates a unique, Asian/American/Hawaiian dual narrative structure involving with the childhood stories of the two generations. While historicizing the cause of Eleanor's death, Hansen's disease—more specifically, the U.S. national project of controlling the disease—I aim to investigate how Yamanaka redeploys the structure of the *Bildungsroman* in order to interrogate the ways in which the nation-state has played an active role as a societal power of constraint to the Japanese Hawaiian narrative of subject formation. In particular, I focus on the dual narrative structure of Yamanaka's *Bildungsroman* and aim to examine how the text interrogates the interconnection between the protagonist's twofold society: the U.S. nation-state and the protagonist's poverty-stricken, motherless family. In reading *Blu's Hanging*, I consider the family's history with Hansen's disease (the *national* constraint) and the feeling of love (the *familial* constraint) as two main causes of the conflicts Ivah encounters over the course of her coming-of-age.

Bertram and Eleanor's coming-of-age mediated through the U.S. racialization of leprosy exemplifies Grace Kyungwon Hong's conceptualization of "dispossession" as a

“condition of social death,” which is elaborated as “not only the actual denial of lack of property, wealth, or assets, which is certainly the case, but the fundamental condition of not being able to own that is both produced by and legitimates the denial or lack of actual property” (8). The older generation’s “dispossession” of self in turn affects the later generation’s right to own one’s body, one’s possessive individualization. While contesting the assumption of a natural right to one’s “own *Person*”—a central tenet of the rights of American citizenship and of the European classical *Bildungsroman* protagonist—Ivah strives to negotiate a set of binaries (Asian vs. American, and leper vs. citizen) that have been historically promulgated as mutually exclusive by the U.S. nation-state. As the narrative progresses, Ivah painstakingly achieves a compromise as she comes to at once embrace her cultural memories and assert her personal choice. *Blu’s Hanging*’s “compromise”—Ivah’s conviction that leaving her family to attend the Mid-Pac in Honolulu, in the long run, will help not only Ivah as one individual but also the whole family gain social mobility—demonstrates its own unique adaptation of the *Bildungsroman*’s logic of “as well as,” a critical condition of modern socialization. Yamanaka redeploys the genre as a subversive tool for the hybrid subject/citizen to help decipher, and then reconcile, the contradiction in her multilateral—Asian, Hawaiian, and American—world that has been veiled from the historical view. As opposed to the national narrative dictating the binaries of Asian/leper and American/citizen, Ivah proclaims that the contradiction can be truly reconciled, and the coexistence of “Asian Hawaiian American” must be possible without one’s relinquishing the other(s). Compared to Eric Liu’s *assimilative Bildungsroman* whose “compromise” takes place only at the expense of “dilut[ing]” his Chineseness, Yamanaka’s re-deployment of the “as

well as” narrative and her deconstruction of the Asian/American binary with Iva’s claiming of her Hawaiianess are truly meaningful to the self-fashioning of Asian Hawaiian subjectivity.

Amy Chua’s controversial parenting memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, is the focus of Chapter V. By re-contextualizing the formal structures of classical European *Bildungsroman* (a story of coming-of-age) and traditional Asian American autobiography (an account of a person’s life story narrated by the person), Chua creates a unique, upper-class Asian American *competitive Bildungsroman* of two third-generation teenage girls, Sophia and Lulu. Chua contributes to the Asian American generic transformations of the *Bildungsroman* while utilizing the model of responsible, disciplinary parents (“tiger mom”) and indebted, obedient children (“model minority” kids). Not only is the narrative of the siblings’ *Bildung* vicariously composed by their mother, but the course of their *Bildung* narrative is thoroughly governed by the mother’s efforts, plans, and schemes to train her daughters to be professional musicians. While telling of the parenting experiences of the tiger mom as a pretext of Sophia’s and Lulu’s *Bildung* narratives, *Battle Hymn* demystifies the universalizing claims of the American ethos—the American Dream—and the classical European *Bildungsroman*. For Chua’s text cogently exposes it is not an absolute freedom or independence but a *limitation* of them that would eventually grant the youth those ideals, prerequisite for an individual to become a mature, civilized adult. While both the American socio-political ethos and the literary genre publicly valorize liberal concepts of—and the individual’s needs for—freedom, autonomy, and independence, Chua’s *competitive Bildungsroman* highlights the improbability of the ideal subject formation but for institutional interventions; central to Sophia’s success (her

making it to Carnegie Hall), above all, was the opulent tiger mom's financial support and dedicated attention. In turn, the narrative ironically seems to render Sophia's success as un-becoming—rather than becoming—a possessive individual. Consequently, Chua's text demonstrates that the liberal individual who would plot his/her successful life story, “owing nothing to society,” is a mirage rather than a reality, particularly in the context of the twenty-first-century America where there is rarely institutional support from the nation-state to guarantee the equal maximization of the youth's potential regardless of one's descent relations (such as race and class).

The Asian American writers all diversify formal and thematic features of the conventional *Bildungsroman* in order to contest the universalizing claims of American national ideals. Conventionally designed to depict the development of modern subject/citizen's harmonious integration into the nation-state, the narrative form of the *Bildungsroman* truly serves as a victorious literary device for writers of Asian descent to defend and challenge Americanness which assumes liberal democratic freedoms and rights for all. While contesting generic transformations of the genre, the literary tradition of the Asian American *Bildungsroman*—including both fictional and autobiographical writings—strives to represent the racial group's struggles to challenge the national construction of the group's image as the Other. Meanwhile, the formal expressions of an Asian American modern socialization vary, depending on the elements of their social identities. In particular, class as a crucial element to one's abilities and capacities to claim self-possession has a tremendous impact on how my protagonists achieve their own modern socialization. To be sure, Liu reworks the genre in order to claim a full membership to idealized democratic American society that highly values a citizen's

freedoms and rights to choose one's destiny, spouse, and fortune. By contrast, to some other writers such as Ng and Yamanaka, such a mission is seemingly impossible; their predecessors' dispossession, created and reinforced by the nation-state's regulating Asian bodies, has continuously hindered the next generation's liberal subject formation. Accordingly, it was necessary for them to invent a new type of *Bildungsroman* protagonist, driven to focus on the cultivation of one's underprivileged, deprived community, instead of projecting a self-centered developmental narrative. Chua's composition of her two daughters' *Bildungsroman* keenly acknowledges the ostensibility of American democratic ideals. Therefore, in order to portray the liberal subject formation of her daughters, Chua had to invent a distinctive genre that transforms both the classical European *Bildungsroman* and the literary tradition of Asian American autobiography.

CHAPTER II
(RE)CLAIMING HISTORY, LIES, AND DISPOSSESSION OF A “[S]TEPDAUGHTER
OF A PAPER SON” IN *BONE*: FAE MYENNE NG’S COMMUNAL
BILDUNGSROMAN

To be a hero of the *Bildungsroman*, in a conventional sense, is to disown his/her parents and to leave for an unpredictable, uncertain journey, in order for the young, restless protagonist to be reborn as a triumphant citizen. In this spirit, Franco Moretti thematizes “youth” at once as the *subject* and *condition* of the genre; to the critic, a mobility imposed by the destabilizing forces of capitalism entitles one to dismantle the continuity between generations, so much so the “youth” mirrors “modernity” and vice versa, both of which are “attributes of mobility and inner restlessness” (Moretti 5). In this chapter, I examine Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone* (1994), a *communal Bildungsroman* whose main protagonist and narrator comes to claim her identity as a “stepdaughter of a paper son” (Ng 61). Projecting double journeys of the two parallel protagonists—Leila and her stepfather Leon—Ng’s text creates a unique narrative of the second-generation Chinese American’s subject formation. By putting “paper” relations forward as a structural condition of the *communal Bildungsroman*, Ng first highlights the protagonist’s deprivation of “self-possession,” a crucial condition of the classical European *Bildungsroman* protagonist. Consequently, the author re-inscribes particularities of Leila’s modern socialization, which entails her painful acknowledgement of the continuities between the past (the histories of Grandpa Leong and her stepfather, Leon) and the present (Leila’s subject formation). This unique structure is opposed to the

Morettian classical *Bildungsroman* which in essence valorizes the concept of break while favoring an unprecedented journey towards the future over generational continuities back to the past.

In Ng's *Bone*, the three-generation Chinese American family has been built through "paper" relations instead of blood, which reflects the legislative history of Asian exclusion. Ng's use of the "paper" relations in her *communal Bildungsroman* is truly strategic if one compares this structural characteristic with that of the classical European *Bildungsroman*. I argue that Ng utilizes "paper" families in order to highlight the later generation's compulsory possession of remainings of the U.S. production of race relations: the exclusion of Asian Americans through exclusive immigrant laws, racialized citizenship, and "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz). In spite of the constructedness of the generational connections—or of the lack of blood relations—both Leila (stepdaughter) and Leon (paper son) still confront an imperative of duty to care for the old generation and put themselves through an ordeal to look after the old in seeking a narrative of modern socialization. While representing the two Chinese American protagonists' self-fashioning of fictive, if not biological, generational continuity, Ng's *Bone* challenges the U.S. nation-state's ostensible liberal democracy as well as the genre's supposedly universal belief in the equal value and rights of the subject-citizen. As opposed to the classical *Bildungsroman*'s normative protagonist who freely savors the liberties of autonomous individuality by symbolically disavowing his/her blood relationship to the old generation, Ng's protagonists are compelled to contribute to a cultivation of generational, communal connections, although fictive.

By depicting Leila's seeking possessive individualism to no avail, Ng's *Bone* endorses yet questions the supposed promise of the genre in the context of the U.S. production of ideal, abstract citizenship. Ng's *Bildungsroman*, having the two protagonists not fully embraced by the national imagining of ideal citizenry, highlights the impossibility for the racialized, underprivileged subject to retain possessive individualism as a pre-existing condition of their subject formation. Accordingly, following the conventional patterns of the classical *Bildungsroman* is not only impossible but also undesirable for the protagonists, and they are to invent new patterns in self-fashioning his/her differential, *communal Bildung* narrative. In my reading of Leila's and Leon's *Bildung* narratives, Confucianism also functions as a compulsive narrative of generational continuity regardless of the lack of blood relations between the old and the new generations, and in turn it prevents them from producing a smooth developmental narrative. Leon as a paper son of an early Chinese immigrant worker who settled in California, has lived through the U.S. exclusive production of "the possessive investment in whiteness," and as a result he suffers an unresolved grief directly caused by a moral debt he permanently owes to his paper father, Leong. In so doing Leon denies, and is denied, possessive individualism, remaining as a dispossessed citizen whose world cannot be recognized by the possessive free-market nation-state. In addition, this chapter examines how Leila strategizes the act of recording histories of her "paper" predecessors—including Grandpa Leong as well as Leon—as an alternative way to articulate her *Bildung* narrative. As the text represents, to write the memories of the past to Leila is prerequisite for the protagonist to move forward, so much so she must remember the histories of her predecessors rather than assert a clean break by forgetting,

and severing herself from, the oppressed histories. My reading of the mixture of the non-biological three-generation's *Bildung* narrative thus aims to mark the return of the unfulfilled of possessive individualism and liberal democracy within the context of the U.S. nation-state.

At the outset of her *Bildungsroman*, Ng strategically deploys the language of consent which defines idealized Americanness, by beginning her novel with the protagonist's confession that she just got married at the New York City Hall without telling her parents: "On vacation recently, visiting Nina in New York, I got married. I didn't marry on a whim—don't worry, I didn't do a green-card number. Mason Louie was no stranger. We'd been together four, five years, and it was time" (3). Leila goes on to explain her motive: "I wanted a marriage of choice. I wanted this marriage to be for me" (18). The beginning of the novel evinces that *Bone*'s narrative is sparked by, above all, Leila's individualistic desire to make her own nuclear family. At first glance, it thus appears to readers that from this point the novel would by and large delve into the process in which the protagonist, taking her husband's last name as Leila *Louie*, builds a nuclear family anew. Despite this expectation, the novel, most of which is organized by a reverse chronology, rather subsequently releases the protagonist's family history, including the stories of her stepfather, Leon, Leon's paper father (Grandpa Leong), and her younger sister, Ona. The novel consists of fourteen chapters, and in each following chapter Leila narrates events prior to what happens in the preceding chapter. Unwittingly the novel, hence, does not get to depict any upcoming event that would happen to her newly-formed nuclear family. Inasmuch as the protagonist's consciousness is interrupted by her

memories of the past, it in effect prevents the narrative from moving forward. In comparison with the classical *Bildungsroman*'s progressive and individualistic narrative trajectory, *Bone*'s non-progressive and quintessentially generational narrative is the symptomatic of the protagonist's deprivation of self-possession. Not only is the structure of the novel overdetermined by the tension between her old family and new one, but the plot of the novel does also render the two incompatible. To elaborate, the first chapter focuses on Leila's hesitant process of revealing the marriage to her mother as well as Leon; the remainder of the novel exposes her past prior to the marriage, which mostly involves her memories of the family's coping with two deaths—the premature death of the middle daughter, Ona, and the death of Grandpa Leong. In so doing the text also reveals the immigrant stories of Grandpa Leong as well as of her parents. As the text presents the protagonist's marriage and the funerals of her family members as two main axes of the narrative trajectory, Leila's writing of her coming-of-age story is tremendously marked by these events.

Although Leila struggles to deploy marriage as a way for her individuation, her marriage and building a new family with her chosen partner alike are represented as rather suspended. And I argue the unfulfillment of Leila's building her own nuclear family bears witness to the repressed of possessive individualism and liberal democracy. Ng's text, presenting the non-normative rites of passage of the lower-class Chinese American female subject, thus challenges the universal model of rites of passage the classical European *Bildungsroman* uses. A process of growing up supposedly consists of successive transitional events, and marriage is evidently one of them in the sense that marriage requires severing oneself from one's parents. A renowned French ethnographer

and folklorist, Arnold Van Gennep in his book, *The Rites of Passage*, theorizes a series of rites of passage the life of an individual in any society would contain. According to Gennep, although how and why a particular social group does various ceremonies of lifetime events are varied depending on the culture of the group, each ceremony is purposefully designed for an individual to progress to the next stage in his/her given society. Gennep writes:

Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood (or motherhood, in case of a female subject), advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another. (Gennep 3)

In particular, Gennep points out that “[m]arriage constitutes the most important of the transitions from one social category to another” in that normative individual’s “maturity” is achieved through the founding of his/her own nuclear family. The role of normative marriage in Gennep’s paradigm of rites of passage resonates with how marriage has been a trope of liberal subjecthood and citizenship in the American culture. As Werner Sollors points out, marriage points to the creation of *consent* relations—as opposed to *descent* relations defined by blood—and it thus emphasizes a normative liberal subject’s abilities as a mature free citizen (6). In the context of American culture, the most common rites of marriage would be the wedding ceremony, the exchange of rings between the bride and groom, the change of residence, and the change of last name. In categorizing rites of passage, Gennep subdivides it into *rites of separation* (prominent in funeral ceremonies), *transition rites* (pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation), and *rites of incorporation* (marriages); however, as he further elaborates, each rite of passage often involves more

than one of those three subcategories (Gennep 11). To clarify, the marriage rites I mentioned above simultaneously imply an incorporation into a new environment (new family, new residence, new surname) and a separation from a previous social group (old family). Nonetheless, the narrative of *Bone* presents the protagonist's marriage as something that has not been fulfilled yet, which is by and large demonstrated by the absence of normative marriage rites. As Leila confesses, the marriage was done without a proper wedding ceremony: "Last minute, like refugees, a strange city. Hurried. A borrowed dress. No rings. Just yes, yes" (18).

As Leila clearly asserts at the outset, her storytelling is above all motivated by her individualistic quest for an autonomous selfhood (18). Throughout the text, *Bone* traces an arduous process through which Leila strives to overcome her agony in declaring her independence from her family. To her, a way to achieve independence is by marrying a man *she chose*. In other words, by making a nuclear family of her own with her chosen partner, she would absolve herself of the responsibility to take care of her first-generation immigrant parents who barely managed to open a small store in San Francisco's Chinatown after several decades of hard work as a seamstress and a manual laborer. As the eldest daughter of the family, Leila has taken a role of representing her parents whose English is not always comprehensible. Leila recollects her years as a young girl: "Growing up, I wasn't as generous. I hated standing in the lines: social security, disability, immigration. What I hated most was the talking for Mah and Leon, the whole translation number. Every English word counted and I was responsible. I went through a real resentment stage" (17). In this light, *Bone*, having the working-class immigrant family as the base of Leila's narrative of *Bildung*, presents the role of parents and child

reversed; it is the child (Leila) who takes care of the parents (Mah and Leon), not vice versa. Not only does Leila have to be representative of her parent, but she does also have to look for him since Leon constantly disappears, like a child. Leila hates the thought of Leon wandering in Chinatown so that she even takes Leon to work when she drives around the town for home visits.

Furthermore, Leila's public figure as a community relation specialist is an opposite to the classical *Bildungsroman*'s normative protagonist, the one who dismantles the continuity between generations. In the local community Leila functions as the bridge between a teacher and Chinese parents whose family, including their children, recently migrated to the states, while doing the home visits. She is fluent enough in Chinese, so she mostly functions as an interpreter between the two parties (teacher and parents), both linguistically and culturally. Yet she does not enjoy home visits much since those families' apartments often remind her of her own family's living environments: "Being inside their cramped apartments depresses me. I'm reminded that we've lived like that, too . . . Bare lives. Everyday I'm reminded nothing's changed about making a life or raising kids" (17). Following Leila's gaze, readers would notice she observes the Chinatown community (including her family in it) from the perspective of both outsider and insider. Although she is part of the community, she is willing to escape. "For me, the one good thing about getting married was that I was finally rid of my real father's name. Fu. I've always hated its sound," said Leila (18). In addition to validating her individualistic narrative of choice, another advantage the marriage would bring her is that she could escape from the connection to her old family, at least in her name. Nonetheless,

Leila's desire to escape her old family and local community through marriage is interrupted by an unexpected death of her sister, Ona.

Exposing the marriage to her parents belatedly becomes even a harder task for Leila due to the family's recent loss of the middle daughter, Ona, whose death the family is still striving to overcome. After Ona's death, Leila who had been living with her soon-to-be husband, Mason, had to move back to her parents' place on Salmon Alley, since Mah did not know how to deal with grief. Even after Leila got married to Mason, she is hesitant to move back in with Mason, since his place in the Mission is two bus transfers away from Chinatown. To make things worse, the youngest daughter Nina left for New York, and that makes Leila feel even more responsible to "protect" Mah from bad thoughts. All in all, the whole narrative trajectory is governed by the family's trying to understand the death of Ona, who killed herself by jumping off the thirteenth floor of the Nam Ping Yuen, the tallest building in Chinatown. At first glance, a main obstacle to Leila's self-fashioning of her own nuclear family seems the death of Ona, since the tragic event in effect forced Leila to move in back to her parents' place. As she says, "Everything went back to Ona" (50). So much so Leila wonders what made her middle sister make such a horrible choice, what she, as an older sister, could have done to save Ona, and what she could have said to help her little sister. As the novel progresses, the two-generation family histories are gradually exposed by Leila's narration, and in so doing the text sheds light on the ways in which a non-normative nuclear family has been repeatedly inherited from the old generation to the new generation (from Grandpa Leong to Leon, and then from Leon to Leila), having modified its particular shape. The old generation of the Chinese immigrant subject as the recipient of the U.S. nation-state's

racialized and gendered immigrant policies was fated to fail to make a normative nuclear family, and the construction of a non-normative family in effect has maintained the structural condition for the new generation and rendered the young (both Leon and Leila) dispossessed. As opposed to a white bourgeois subject of a normative modern nuclear family, a condition enabling both the classical *Bildungsroman* and the modern nation-state, Grandpa Leong's status as a perpetual bachelor not only hindered his possessive individuation but also his future generations'.

A Nuclear Family: A Unit of the Classical *Bildungsroman* and the Modern Nation-State

In "Melancholic Remains: Domestic and National Secrets in Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*" Juliana Chang examines how the non-normative nuclear family in *Bone* bears witness to the remnants of earlier histories—the exploitation of racial labor and the exclusionary immigration laws. Central to her argument is that "[t]he normative nuclear family, as a signifier of modernity, serves as a structure enabling the legibility of modern, national subjects" (114). The critic focuses on how the tropes of family and sexuality have aided the formations of modernity and modern nation-statehood. As the site of legitimate and reproductive sexuality the nuclear family exemplifies civilization and modernity, and the civilized family sociality is opposed to a racial ghetto inhabited by male bachelors and female prostitutes (i.e. Chinatown during the era of exclusion) and thus marked by primitive, unregulated sexuality. Pushing Chang's argument further, I argue the normative nuclear family is a structure not only legitimating the ideal national subject-citizen in the geopolitical space, but also reproducing the free, self-possessive

protagonist in the literary space of the *Bildungsroman*. The patterns of the three-generation families (Grandpa Leong/Leon and Mah/Leila and Mason), despite a particularity of each generation, all do not follow the model of normative nuclear family, each of which I will discuss in more depth later. At first glance, the three-generation family in *Bone*—grandfather (Leong), parents (Mah and Leon), three children (Leila, Ona, Nina)—seems to represent an assimilation of the ethnic American subject into the nation-state. However, what the text subsequently reveals is the unfinished transition from earlier non-normative (“bachelor” society) to normative (“nuclear family”) phases of the racialized national subjects. If grandpa Leong signifies the “bachelor” phase in which Chinese immigrant subjects were first of all excluded with racialized, gendered immigration laws and policies, and then exploited after their entry to the states due to their “illegal” status, Mah and Leon’s pseudo-nuclear family exemplifies the ongoing transition from racialized democracy to fulfilled democracy of the U.S nation-state. What I am particularly interested in is 1) how the non-normative nuclear family has been engendered in the reaction to the U.S. nation-state’s biased treatments of racial and class differences, and more importantly 2) how the deferred construction of the normative nuclear family affects the new generation at the turn of the century in weaving her own narrative of *Bildung*, and 3) how the hyphenated national subject manages to create her own quest narrative (“individuation”) while dealing with her family, community, and nation-state (“socialization”). The narrative posits Leila’s construction of her own nuclear family as partially unfulfilled, therefore Leila’s *Bildung* narrative bears witness to a generational continuity rather than a clean break of the contemporary, second-generation immigrant subject from the old.

If the *Bildungroman* has a hyphenated national subject as its protagonist, what would happen? What does it mean for the non-normative subject to accomplish the developmental transition from restless youth to civilized maturity, which is one crucial element in the genre's structural assumptions? In Moretti's paradigm of the *Bildungsroman*, the genre quintessentially describes the process in which "youth" is subsumed by the idea of "maturity." In other words, it depicts a process in which a "minor" becomes a "major" as the protagonist becomes a legitimate part of society. According to Moretti, youth is "modernity's essence," and thus "[t]he *Bildungsroman* serves as the symbolic form of modernity." In this paradigm, the genre's protagonist, assumed to be a member of modern bourgeois society, is expected to seek a quest narrative in the future rather than in the past (Moretti 3-14). In the context of the Asian American *Bildungsroman*, I argue the meanings of "youth" and "minor" become more complicated as the Asian American literary tradition deals with a racialized subject. A "minor" can have two different, although related, meanings: 1) a person who is considered not having reached maturity (In this case, "minor" could be substituted for "inferior," "lower," or "lesser."); 2) a person who is not yet old enough to have the rights of an adult. While the latter can be understood with a clear yardstick such as one's age, determining whether a person is a "minor" or not in the former sense is a flexible issue, depending on each society's way of gauging one's level of "maturity." Moreover, a society with its own rationale often excludes "the rights of an adult" from a group of people even if the individuals have attained the age of majority; excluding rights from Asian immigrants during the era of exclusion, based on racial/ethnic differences, would be one clear example of this case. In this light, a *Bildung* narrative created by an

individual who belongs to a minority group is destined to be different from the conventional *Bildung* narrative. In other words, for the discriminated subject not recognized as a legitimate, ideal national subject, the progress to “maturity” vis-à-vis “major” might not be promising. For instance, Ng’s novel constructs its narrative by looking into “the past,” rather than “the future.” In so doing, the narrative through Leila’s gaze represents a differential *Bildung* narrative of her stepfather, Leon, who has not been able to achieve the presumed goal of the genre (becoming a major) due to his status as a paper son. In addition, the process of Leila’s self-fashioning her own *Bildung* narrative too cannot be the same as the conventional one because of the particularity of her “society,” by and large represented by the Leon’s and Mah’s non-normative nuclear family, which has been also affected by their predecessor, bachelor Grandpa Leong.

While reading *Bone* published at the turn of the 20th century, readers could clearly observe how racialized subjects and their communities are still haunted by earlier histories of exclusion and exploitation. Historically speaking, Asians were the first racial group that was excluded from naturalization. Along with successive immigration exclusion acts and laws against naturalization of Asians, the U.S. has exclusively constructed its statehood and its citizenry. Since the mid-nineteenth century, various ethnic groups of Asian descent were categorized as an “alien ineligible to citizenship” because of the race-based immigration exclusion acts, and the bar to citizenship had remained until the Magnuson Act of 1943, which repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and established the Chinese immigrant quota. Nonetheless, what we must bear in mind is the legal axis of definitions of citizenship has been shaped through not only racialization but also gendering of the Asian American population. The first chapter of

Lisa Lowe's book, *Immigrant Acts*, examines how the Asian America(n) has been always a contested site on which the U.S. nation-state and its citizenship have been constructed.

In the chapter, Lowe also talks about how the administration of citizenship is simultaneously a collaboration of racialization and gendering, providing specific examples of the immigration laws against naturalization of Asian female immigrants:

The 1943 enfranchisement of the Chinese American into citizenship, for example, constituted the Chinese immigrant subject as male; in the 1946 modification of the Magnuson Act, the Chinese wives of U.S. citizens were exempted from the permitted annual quota; as the law changed to reclassify "Chinese immigrants" as eligible for naturalization and citizenship, female immigrants were not included in this reclassification but were in effect specified only in relation to the changed status of "the Chinese immigrant," who was legally presumed to be male. (Lowe 11)

Needless to say, such U.S. immigration laws resulted in an unbalanced Chinese population which was predominantly male. Ng's *Bone* portrays San Francisco's Chinatown in the 1990s as a "bachelor" society that is still overpopulated with old Chinese male workers. Through Leila's eyes, readers would observe a group of Chinese men idling away their time on the streets. To Leila, San Francisco's Chinatown is a dark, stench, lonesome place where our protagonist sees "scraps of dark remnant fabric" from faces of old Chinese male wanders (8). They came to the U.S. without female partners and spent away most of their lifetime doing hard manual labors. The "shadows of faces" Leila sees in San Francisco's Chinatown signify the residue of earlier histories of the racialized, gendered exclusion of Asians and the exploitation of their labors.

Bone further demonstrates how the American nation-state's Janus-faced image (its idealized image as "the land of opportunity" for hardworking immigrants vs. its exclusive immigration policy) has enticed Chinese immigrants and then hindered their building of a normative nuclear family. The non-normativeness of Leila's three-

generation family is depicted in various ways. As she acknowledges, Leila has never seen her biological father, Lyman Fu, with whom her Mah initially came to San Francisco, seeking his plans in America. After quickly noticing that things were not quite the same as he expected, Mr. Fu, “a crimp, a coolie broker,” left for Austria, “the new gold mountain,” while leaving Mah (and Leila growing in her belly) behind (187). While waiting for her runaway husband with little hope, Mah met Leon Leong, and she married him mainly to attain the green card. As Leila says, “It was no secret; even Leon knew that was why she said yes” to his marriage proposal (182). Therefore, Leila believes “[m]arriage (to Mah) was for survival,” not for love; while Mah married her biological father to escape a war-torn, poverty-stricken village, Mah remarried her stepfather to be saved from her disgraced, illegitimate status as a Chinese single mom in the U.S. without proper documentation. As for Leon, he attained the green card through his paper father, Grandpa Leong. A Chinese immigrant bachelor, “Grandpa Leong was Leon’s father only on paper; he sponsored Leon’s entry into the country by claiming him as his own son” (50). As the text shows, the non-normativeness of the early Chinese immigrant families is characterized by its overemphasis on *paper* over *blood*. In the conventional sense, the relation between your parents and yourself is often connected by blood while the family you construct anew with your partner is connected by marriage. By contrast, *Bone* displays unconventional nuclear family models that the racialized immigrant subject had to strategically create in their adopted homeland where “paper is (considered) more precious than blood” (9). The absence of blood relations is ubiquitous in *Bone*, and it truly sheds light on the legislative history of exclusion of the racialized immigrant subject. The blood relation is absent not only in the father and son relationship between

Leon and Granpa Leong (“paper” father) but also in the father and daughter relationship between Leila and Leon (“step”father).

Provided that Leila in trying to seek her individualistic narrative happens to disclose the history of Leon and Grandpa Leong, *Bone* could be read as the *Bildung* narrative of the first-generation immigrant man (Leon and/or Grandpa Leong), rather than merely that of the second-generation immigrant woman (Leila). Leon’s status as a(n) (il)legal/(il)legitimate national subject is highly debatable because he has attained his citizenship through his fictive, non-biological relationship to Grandpa Leong. During the era of exclusion, Chinese immigrants could migrate to the states by claiming fabricated identities as children of U.S. citizens. The interrogation on Angel Island was thorough, and therefore the paper sons had to memorize their paper fathers’ history to be reborn as a new person in their newly adopted homeland. Grandpa Leong sponsored Leon’s entry into the states, and Leon, then fifteen, got on the S.S. *Lincoln*, as “the fourth son of a farm worker in the Sacramento valley, [whose] mother had bound feet, [whose] family was from Hoiping” (9). For Grandpa Leong’s sponsorship, Leon was asked two things: “Five thousand American dollars” and “the promise to send Grandpa Leong’s bones back to China” (50). In an interview with Jennifer Brostrom, Ng explains her intention in giving her book the title, *Bone*: “Bone seems to me to be the best metaphor for the enduring quality of the immigrant spirit. The book’s title honors the old-timers’ desire to have their bones sent back to China for proper burial” (“Interview” 88). Resonating with Ng’s comment, Grandpa Leong’s latter request underlines the unassimilability of the early Chinese immigrant worker who lived through the era of exclusion.

The Story of Grandpa Leong: A Creation of Fictive Generational Continuity and Its Racialized Effects

Grandpa Leong represents a whole body of excluded and exploited Chinese migrant workers whose histories have not yet been recognized within a framework of modern national narrative. Grandpa Leong came first to mine gold and then settled into farm work. According to Leila's recollection, Grandpa Leong was an epitome of the unassimilated, first-generation Chinese migrant manual laborer: "Grandpa Leong looked like the oldest of all the old men that we knew. He looked ancient, like one of the Eight Holy Immortals, a smart old god . . . He had a sun-leathered face, and so many wrinkles around his eyes" (78). He exemplifies a "bachelor," represented by early Chinese male immigrant workers who could not make their own nuclear families in their new homeland, thus could not assimilate into American society. A racialized immigrant subject, bachelor Grandpa Leong implies the absence of both normative "marriage" and "fatherhood" stages and thus challenges the universalizing generalization of Gennep's rites of passage. The way in which Grandpa Leong attained "fatherhood" was definitely non-normative; for he became a father without passing the stage of "marriage," by claiming Leon as a paper son. Provided that a marriage was hardly an option for Chinese immigrant bachelors during the era of exclusion due to not only racialized but also gendered immigration laws and policies, Grandpa Leong's self-attaining fatherhood, although fabricated, through the creation of paper father-and-son relationship is anomalous yet subversive. The fictive familial relationship not only granted fatherhood to Grandpa Leong but also allowed another excluded, immigrant subject, Leon, a chance to follow his American Dream. Only with the fictive identity as a paper son of Grandpa

Leong could Leon circumvent strict immigration laws, which in turn catalyzed Leon's claiming of his political and social agency in his adopted homeland. The fictive relationship between Leon and Grandpa Leong underscores, and challenges, the constructedness of the binary of legal and illegal *or* legitimate and illegitimate. Nonetheless, the resistance act of creating "paper" families not only liberates but also limits the subjecthood of the youth since it was undeniably created through the identity of race. *Bone* demonstrates how the U.S. societal production of race as an hierarchy and the Chinese tradition of Confucianism are directly passed on to Leon and then to Leila, and hindered their liberal subject formation.

After decades of hard work, Grandpa Leong passed away without leaving any savings as well as any descendants connected by blood; what he only left were "two things, a snake in a jar and a tame pigeon tied to his windowsill" (78). In addition, the text describes Grandpa Leong's death as unexpected and pitiful. As mysterious as it sounds, Leila, who does not know how Grandpa Leong had died, overheard her mother say "how it would have been better if he were laying down, in bed at least" (79). Although it does not offer a clear image of Grandpa Leong's death, readers could conjecture the death was not peaceful, and neither was his life. In this light, Grandpa Leong's alienation could be understood with two elements: physical and psychic weariness. According to Karl Marx, the proletariat in modern bourgeois society experiences "alienation" mainly because "the work is *external* to the worker" in the sense that the work appears to be not for himself but for "someone else." Marx's theory of class struggles is based on the dichotomy of two classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, in which the proletariat, despite its economic contribution, does not get to be included in

bourgeois modern society. The exclusion of the proletariat is exemplified in the “surplus value” they create in the workplace, which is not proportionally converted into the money the proletariat is given. This is how Marx explains the proletariat’s “alienation” in which the worker is not only “physically exhausted” but also “mentally debased” (Marx 169-70). Grandpa Leong’s lifetime alienation is caused by the dichotomy of the American national (legal and legitimate) subject and the racialized, Asian immigrant (illegal and illegitimate) subject that the nation-state has created in order to delineate its idealized yet exclusive citizenry. While the nation-state could not define the former without the expense of the latter, the contribution of the latter to the construction of the nation-state, both ontologically and economically, has not been properly recognized. The contradiction between the nation-state and the racialized immigrant subject has not been reconciled until the end of Grandpa Leong’s life, and the unassimilability is proved with his request to his paper son, Leon, to send his bones back to China for burial. Despite all the years he had spent in the states Grandpa Leong did not feel accepted, so much so he desired to achieve a sense of belonging by having his bones be buried in his original homeland. For a bachelor who did not have any family member in the states to fulfill his final wish, it was truly necessary to forge, if not reproduce, an offspring.

Although it is fictive, the relationship between Grandpa Leong and Leon sheds light on traditional Chinese culture, family concept, and lifestyle, which still have impacts on contemporary Chinese Americans (as well as people in other Asian countries that share Confucian ideologies and beliefs with China—such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Singapore). As the foundation of Chinese culture, Confucianism puts an enormous value on the (blood) relationship between father and son. As epitomized in the

surrounding cultural phenomena of son preference in China (i.e. sex-selective abortion that has been accelerated by the implementation of one child policy, and the unbalanced sex ratio between boys and girls that has been subsequently reinforced by the practice of gendered abortion) the relationship between father and son has been considered the most crucial element of society. In Confucianism, the idea of tracing back ancestry is considered tremendously important in order for a healthy development of self because of the belief that the dead possesses the power to influence the fortune and fate of the remained. Therefore, ancestor veneration is regarded as an ongoing process, or rather a part of daily life, which must be practiced with regular proper rituals; a deceased ancestor is venerated not only through the funeral, but also through subsequent rituals (i.e. setting up the home altars and having annual worships, often prepared with necessities and luxuries such as food, wine, and money). In this light, filial piety, one of the most important values of Confucianism, characterizes a sense of duty and respect a descendant must show to his ancestors. In understanding filial piety in the context of Confucian philosophy, the importance of the relationship between father and son cannot be overemphasized in that at the center of ancestor veneration is the role of the son as the head of the family. It is considered the son's duty, not the daughter's, to provide deceased ancestors with continuous well-being in their afterlife; a daughter will leave the family as she marries, and she, as an obedient wife, will serve her husband practicing worships for his ancestors, not hers. Evidently, the gendered concept of filial piety after all explains the rationale behind the Chinese people's preference for sons. If you have only daughter(s), that almost means you have no child who will take care of your happiness after you die. In other words, although it may sound oxymoronic, having no son in

Confucianism is thus considered fatal since it means the end of your family tree.

Although some people may argue that this strictly gendered Chinese family concept has slowly disappeared, *Bone* clearly shows even the overseas Chinese community in the 1990s is still under the spell of Confucian ideologies. As a family of three girls, Mah and Leon's family is regarded as a failure by the community people: "We were a family of three girls. By Chinese standards, that wasn't lucky. In Chinatown, everyone knew our story. Outsiders jerked their chins, looked at us, shook their heads. We heard things. "A *failed* family . . . Nothing but daughters" "(3 Emphasis mine).

Grandpa Leong's forging his paper son, if not daughter, could be also understood in the context of Confucianism. As a Chinese man, Grandpa Leong wanted to make sure his bones would be taken care of with proper burial, which would in turn assure the well-being of his afterlife. This personal wish truly becomes more understandable and urgent, particularly in the context of his pitiful death as well as exhausted, unrewarded life. In spite of Grandpa Leong's self-fashioning his own fatherhood and requesting his paper son to accompany his bones back to his home country for proper burial, his bones, however, happen to remain lost and anonymous after his death. Not only have the bones been lost—let alone returning to China—but his funeral also did not receive proper veneration and respect in the sense that it happened without his (paper) son's observance. Leon was out on the ocean, on the S.S. *Independent*, working to earn money for his family, and it was Mah who found Grandpa Leong dead. As someone who came to the states as a young woman, Mah was not familiar with how to practice proper Chinese funeral customs, and was upset about having to make all the decisions that are supposedly man's job. She wondered, "Should we have a wake, too? What kind of

coffin? Should it be open or shut? What to write on the gravestone? How to pick a burial site? Was Nina too young to go? Should we all wear hemp? Who would sing the lament song? Should we hire a professional mourner?" (80-81). To make things worse, Grandpa Leong did not leave any money even for his own funeral, so Mah had to ask people for money for the funeral. This anecdote tellingly demonstrates how the nation-state's racialized marginalization (exploiting, and then discarding, the immigrant national subject) in effect puts enormous pressure on females of the under-privileged immigrant family. To be sure, the absence of the head of the nuclear family (or, a "family man") forcefully renders Mah (and subsequently Leila) responsible to vicariously perform the role, which is against their own cultural codes. In need of the presence of a masculine figure, Mah in her preparation for Grandpa Leong's funeral happened to cheat on Leon by having an affair with Tommie Hom, the family's landlord and owner of the sweatshop Mah used to work for as a seamstress. The funeral scene dramatically sheds light on the dissolution and dysfunction of the family ties (not only between Grandpa Leong and Leon but also between Leon and Mah). Simultaneously the event also demonstrates that it is the larger community—not the nuclear family but the Chinatown community at large—that reconstructs the cultural memories through collaborations:

Mah had a hard time handling everything. Grandpa Leong didn't have any savings, so she had to ask around for donations to pay for the casket and the burial clothes. She borrowed Tommie's van because the funeral house didn't have a hearse. She also asked Tommie if she could have a half day off and advance pay. . . He even offered to drive the coffin out to the cemetery. It was all the asking; Mah said she felt like she owed everyone; that was what humiliated her.

At the factory Mah cried when she thought no one could see. The sewing ladies all seemed extra nice, giving their old-country advice, asking if they help, but Mah always shook her head. (79)

By describing Grandpa Leong's funeral as a community event instead of the family's, Ng places more value on the Chinatown community which collectively defies circumstantial attempts to obliterate the memories of Grandpa Leong. The community people, including Tommie Hom, his seamstresses, "Cousin, Croney Kam, Jimmy Lowe, and the Newspaper Man," all came to help as if it is their own family's funeral (85).

Nonetheless, Grandpa Leong's funeral did not fully reflect the complex formality of Chinese funerals. Mah neither wore hemp nor wept for a show, both of which are crucial part of formal mourning practices in Chinese culture. The coffin in which Grandpa Leong's dead body would lie down and rest for the afterlife was prepared by "the poor man's funeral house"; even Ona, then a young girl, could tell the dead man's coffin "looked cheap" (83). As Leila recollects the day of Grandpa Leong's funeral, she imagines what would have happened if Grandpa Leong were not a bachelor:

If Grandpa Leong had been a family man, he might have had real tears, a grieving wife draped in muslin, the fabric weaving around her like burnt skin. The wife might have wailed, chanting the lament songs. . . Hopefully—and there was hope if there were children—when his children were grown and making their own money, they'd dig up his bones, pack them in a clay pot, send them—no, accompany them—back to the home village for a proper burial. (82)

Despite his effort to have a son without procreation, the relationship between Grandpa Leong and Leon cannot function as the one of the normative nuclear family in the end, precisely due to the inheritance of societal constraint of race. To clarify, Leon could not make himself as a "family man" because of the restrictions his cultural background has given. As the head of the normative nuclear family, a family man's devotion to his family would be impossible without financial security. As a racialized working-class man, Leon has had to constantly switch his jobs to earn money, barely enough to feed his family. To the second-class citizen whose right to education was denied by the nation-state, the only

jobs available are temporary odd jobs such as the laundry presser, a help in the restaurant's kitchen, a welder, a busboy, an attendant who cleans captain's room, just to name a few. In particular, Leon usually works on ships since it does not require specific knowledge or professional skills: he "worked hard . . . Out at sea, on the ships, Leon worked every room: Engine, Deck, and Navigation" (34). Due to his constant migration, Leon's presence is ironically represented as the absence of a family man in the domestic space. As a pseudo-migrant worker and pseudo-bachelor, Leon could function neither as a dutiful son nor as a responsible, devoted father. To elaborate, Leon could not attend his (paper) father's funeral. Once he visited his father's grave belatedly, he could not but neglect his duty to make regular visits to the grave since he was busy at work, often on the ship. As a result, Grandpa Leong's grave eventually became one of the "unclaimed" and "abandoned," which, in the light of Confucian ideologies, further exacerbates ill-fated Leon's life.

The Birth of Dispossessed Individual: Leon's Inheritance of Racialized Poverty, Non-Normative Nuclear Family Structure, and Melancholia.

Bone presents Leon's journey to find Grandpa Leong's grave as his own private mourning ritual, a rite of passage for his (paper) father's death he did not get to have at the funeral. In the process of mourning, Leon is rendered as a melancholic subject who fails to reach a resolution of grief and of national contradictions between capital and racialized citizens. About a decade after Grandpa Leong's "abandoned" grave was disinterred and then reburied, Leon looks for the lost bone's whereabouts; this time, it is not his wife but his (step)daughter who helps him practice the rite of mourning. With

Leila's help, Leon finally reaches "the gravestone for the Leong family" where Grandpa Leong's bones was reburied with all the Chinese immigrant workers—"Leong Bing, Leong Kok-min, Leong Tien-fook"—who lived in San Francisco and whose last names were Leong (87). Looking at Leon doing his private ritual with a sack of GOLD COINS and a pack of Lucky Strikes, Leila realizes that Leon's mourning rite is not only for Grandpa Leong, but also for himself: "This wasn't all about Grandpa Leong. Leon was looking for a part of his own lost life" (88). Indeed, as the tombstone demonstrates, the object of Leon's mourning is the whole body of racialized, exploited workers, even including Leon himself whose working conditions are not much different from his predecessors'. As a melancholic subject, Leon represents at once a subject and object of the mourning ritual.

In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud theorizes melancholia as unresolved, pathological mourning. As opposed to in normal mourning, Freud remarks, the object of loss in melancholia appears to be "unknown" and makes the inhibition of melancholic puzzling. In regular mourning, a person manages to overcome the loss of his/her loved one and then re-incorporate into society by composing a new, postloss identity, and mourning rites are supposed to help the healthy detachment of the self from the dead. Genep in *The Rites of Passage* also insists that all rites of passage, including a mourning for the death of parent, involves three phases of separation, transition, and (re)incorporation. In Freud's paradigm, the melancholic fails to achieve Genep's three phases mainly because he fails to separate himself from the dead object. Instead, the melancholic establishes "an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object." As a result, Freud goes on to note, "[t]hus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego (of the

patient), and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object” (Freud 586 Emphasis original). To put it differently, the melancholic suffers the loss of a loved one in regard to his own self and becomes unable to move forward to the later phases of transition and (re)incorporation. Accordingly, Leon could not be a healthy mourner by separating himself from the loss, inasmuch as Grandpa Leong’s life and death are inseparable from, and interrelated to, his own. In Leon’s melancholic reaction to the death of his father, readers would clearly observe the pattern of self-reproach, which Freud considers a remarkable behavior of the melancholic. As Leila notices, Leon first blames himself for all the tragedies that have happened to his family (i.e. Mah’s cheating on him, his failed businesses, and Ona’s committing suicide) for it was him who did not keep the promise to send Grandpa Leong’s bones back to China: “he blamed himself. The misplaced grave, the forgotten bones. Leon gave those bones power, believed they were the bad luck that stirred Ona’s destiny” (88). He believes all of the family tragedies come from “ancestral retribution” (124). Inasmuch as Leon did not take a respectful care of Grandpa Leong’s grave, the dead could not rest in peace even in his afterlife, which in turn negatively affects the fate of Leon’s family.

Nonetheless, it has to be noted that it is rather the institutionalized discrimination of the immigrant national subject—neither Leon’s disrespect for his ancestors nor negligence on his duties—that has caused and exacerbated the family tragedies. In putting the question “Why did all of these family tragedies happen?” forward, *Bone* constructed by a reverse chronology gradually reveals an answer. What readers find as a cause for all the family tragedies is not a singular event (i.e. the broken promise between

Grandpa Leong and Leon), but instead a structural condition of the family that has prevented Leon from achieving the smooth transition from a “bachelor” to a “family man.” Grandpa Leong’s lost bones cannot be a root cause of the family tragedies in that the event has been caused by Leon’s racialized class status; rather, what Leon considered a cause of the problems turns out to be only *part* of the vicious circle, in the sense that Leon could not do proper mourning rituals solely because he was on constant voyages. By employing Leon as someone living in limbo between a bachelor and a family man, the narrative underlines how the promise of liberal democracy of the nation-state has not been fully fulfilled. To be sure, Leon occupies an indefinite stage in the course of one’s linear progression because he is neither a bachelor nor a family man. No doubt there is an undeniable difference between Grandpa Leong and Leon; Leon is married and he has biological children (Ona and Nina). In short, strictly speaking Grandpa Leong was a bachelor, and Leon is not. Nevertheless, as the novel demonstrates Leon’s lifestyle is much closer to that of bachelors than of family men. On the one hand, he keeps shipping, so he could not stay in town with his family. On the other hand, even during those few days when he is in town, Leon keeps moving back and forth to Mah’s house on the Salmon Alley; he has his own hotel room as if he were one of the “old-timer” bachelors. Moreover, like Grandpa Leong, Leon “never intended to stay” in the states (57). Wishing that one day he will go back to China, Leon has kept a stash of money, he called a “Going-Back-to-China fund” (6).

Leon’s indefinite state between a bachelor and a family man is inextricably related to his limbo status as a paper son. As a paper son, Leon’s existence challenges the jurisdictional distinction between the legal, legitimate subject (citizens) and the illegal,

illegitimate subject (aliens). Although his fictive identity as a paper son of Grandpa Leong has granted him a citizenship, he is afraid of being caught by the authority, so much so he keeps making up his identity: “Leon was always getting his real and paper birthdates mixed up; he’s never given the same birthdate twice. Old-timer logic: If you don’t tell the truth, you’ll never get caught in a lie” (57). Leon’s such an indefinite status is exemplified with the metaphor of the ship throughout the text. When he was fifteen, he got on the S.S. *Lincoln* as a paper son of a Chinese American citizen. Ironically, his migration did not end there; after his entry to the states, he had to keep wandering, getting on other ships for living. Still, he could not quite become a family man, both structurally and economically, because the money he receives from shipping was always “[n]ot enough,” as Mah complained, and the family was missing the father in the domestic space. The constant disappearance and (re)appearance of the (step)father has left an indelible mark in Leila’s consciousness, and the opening of Chapter 6 illustrates Leon’s figure as at once a loss and presence: “Leon lost. Leon found” (62). Both his legal status as a citizen and his presence as a family man are always on the verge of disappearance; the dilemma shores up Leon’s melancholic state as the object as well as subject of mourning.

As opposed to the *ship* as the metaphor for the absence of a family man and of a normative nuclear family alike, the narrative deploys the metaphor of the *car* as an antithesis. As a mechanic, Leila’s husband, Mason, works at Phaedrus, the car service center specialized in BMW and Mercedes. So much so, Mason often has a chance to “borrow” one of customers’ fancy cars from work, and the image of Mason driving the car gives Leila a sense of security: “Mason likes to drive fast, not to speed but to sail. But

the BMW wasn't his, so he wasn't pushing it. I've always felt safe with him behind the wheel . . . Being with Mason, being on the road, moving fast in a nice car, I relaxed" (42). Narrated after Leila's confession that she got married, this incident contains the event prior to her marriage, and at the end of the scene, Mason proposed her ("I want you to marry me"), in the borrowed BMW (43). As shown in the internal monologue, the car implying both material prosperity and the presence of family man gives her a sense of security that she could have not had with neither her biological father nor her stepfather. While her biological father (Lyman Fu) has been missing even before her birth, her stepfather is someone for whom you should rather feel responsible, not vice versa. If there is one crucial element that makes Mason an ideal nominee for the head of Leila's new, soon-to-be nuclear family, it is his independence. With Mason, Leila does not need to perform the vicarious role of the family head. "Mason's one person in my life I don't have to worry about, to always think for. Mason can take care of himself," writes Leila (65).

Along with narrating the history of Grandpa Leong, Leila also excavates the history of his stepfather, the story of how Leon has strived to seek his American Dream, how he has struggled to be a devoted father, and how he has failed at both. While there are some stories of Leon (that had been told by himself and then) merely retold by Leila, the text also provides readers with hidden stories of Leon that Leila had to find out by herself, which in turn exposes another side of exclusion of Asian immigrants: discrimination of the hyphenated national subject within the national territory. As the family habitually says, "[s]omething always went wrong for Leon" (52). After working for various odd jobs, Leon eventually opened a small grocery store, L.L.Grocery, on Pacific

Avenue; however, the business did not make any profit, and the family had to sold it at a loss. Then there was a laundry business, Ong and Leong's, which Leon built with a rich Chinese man from outside Chinatown, Luciano Ong. The businesses opened when the three daughters were still young girls; they too invested their time by doing small errands. Despite the whole family's helping out, the laundry went bust as well. This time Leon lost everything; it turned out Luciano ran away with all the money. Leon was helpless because "[t]here was no contract, no legal partnership." As Leila recollects, "Leon and Luc had only shaken hands on the deal" (170). There was always someone who took advantage of Leon's naïve, genuine personality; with the grocery business, for instance, it was "[s]alesmen (who) cheated Leon" (162). Inside the family, Leon is thus considered an annoyance as far as the family economy is concerned, so Mah who barely managed to have her own "Baby Store" does not let Leon involve in her business. Therefore the only thing Leon can do is to get on the ship although it does not give him enough money. As he gets old, Leila asks him to apply for social security, and in the process of collecting the documents for Leon's application Leila happens to dig out the hidden history of Leon by opening his suitcase. It is the suitcase with which Leon arrived on Angel Island, and it contains all the documents and papers that Leon has collected. Amongst the pile of papers, Leila finds a bundle of letters "stacked by year and rubberbanded into decades" (57). As she opens it, she notices that it contains nothing but the history of Leon's exclusion in the country:

A rejection from the army: unfit.

A job rejection: unskilled.

An apartment: unavailable.

My shoulder tightened and I thought about having a scotch. Leon had made up stories for us; so that we could laugh, so that we could understand the rejections. (58-59)

All these letters show how the nation-state has discriminated the racialized, underprivileged subject by stripping the basic rights (the right to serve his country, the right to have a job, and the right to housing) of Leon. If Grandpa Leong's story exemplifies the history of legislative exclusion (the era of exclusion when Chinese people overseas were barred from citizenship and naturalization, and thus shows the nation-state's marginalization of a racial group, taking place outside the U.S. national borders), Leon's story bears witness to an ongoing social exclusion *within* the nation-state: a discrimination of a racial group vis-à-vis a "possessive investment in whiteness," in Lipsitz's terms. In his book, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, Lipsitz exposes how the exclusion of racial minority groups in its renewed form still exists in the late twentieth century of America by focusing on the ways in which state institutions have favored and profited "whites" in such terrains as public housing, health, and transportation. The letters from Leon's old suitcase shed light on Leon's discriminated status as the "second-class" citizen, the phrase often used to refer to various minority groups within a nation-state.

Leon's old suitcase containing papers of the history of exclusion and discrimination demonstrates how he has become an inheritor of Grandpa Leong's racialized poverty, non-normative nuclear family structure, and melancholia as the unfulfilled of the U.S. nation-state's ostensible promises (abstract citizen, American individualism, and liberal democracy). In the contemporary era when biological racism, based on scientific racism, is no longer publicly accepted as a national narrative, Leon's suitcase indicates the existence of new racism "whose dominant theme," according to Etienne Balibar, "is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural

differences” (1991: 21). To be sure, the subsequent rejections from the army and job and housing opportunities Leon has received, assuming the incompatibility between “national” and “immigrant” and/or “possessive” and “dispossessed,” were caused by cultural stereotyping rather than biological or genetic naturalism. Since the successive repeals of Asian exclusion laws and race-based quotas during the 1940s-60s, the historical events that heralded the end of biological racism, Asian Americans have been still considered the “foreigners-within” or “outsiders-within” despite their attainment of citizenship. This ongoing exclusion and discrimination of the Asian Americans within the nation-state is a definite indicator of the nation’s turn from biological racism to new racism. If the American Anglo-Saxonism was a product of biological racism with which the nation-state had defined its citizenry by excluding blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians until the mid twentieth century, the new racism of the U.S. nation-state maneuvers the “possessive investment in whiteness” in maintaining and exacerbating cultural and economic separations of whites and non-whites.² What must be stated for the sake of my discussion is, the “possessive investment in whiteness” as an institutionalized neo-racism generates deadly consequences to the underprivileged while it further exacerbates the helpless condition of the minority group. As seen in Leon’s case, for the discriminated national subject whose basic rights are denied by the nation-

² The phrase, “the American Anglo-Saxonism,” appears in Horsman’s book, *Race and Manifest Destiny*. As for the definition of “new racism” and its particular production in the U.S. nation-state, see Etienne Balibar’s “Is there a ‘Neo-Racism’?” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 17-28; Lipsitz’s *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*; Claire Jean Kim’s “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans.” *Politics & Society* 27.1 (1999): 105-38.

state ever since his entry to the U.S., to achieve a developmental progression was seemingly impossible.

As someone whose potential is restricted by both race and class, Leon faces a double exploitation; not only has Leon been exploited by his adopted country as a cheap, replaceable, racialized laborer, but he was also exploited by a member from his own ethnic community. The higher-class Chinese businessmen, Luciano Ong as well as Tommie Hom, represent the privileged few amongst the racialized national subject. Migrated from Peru, Luc's family "blew into Chinatown like a thunderstorm." Not surprisingly, Luc's masculine figure as an economically-stable father who has two sons contrasts to that of Leon as a pseudo-bachelor; everything Luc has equally shows what Leon lacks. Inasmuch as Luc symbolizes the family man which Leon has yearned to be to no avail, Leon became an admirer of Luc: "Bing-boned, broad-backed, and loud-voiced, [Luc] was the tallest man in Portsmouth Square . . . Leon talked about Luc all the time . . . Luc tipped Paul Lim twenty dollars for parking his car. Luc bought snakeskin shoes at Florsheim. Luc had a gold Rolex. Soon Luc was going to buy a new Cadillac" (165). Eventually Leon asked Luc to open a business with him, Ong and Leong's laundry, and Luc accepted the offer. Despite the proposition, "fifty-fifty," the way their business partnership works emasculates Leon: "[Luc] called himself the marketing manager, the *outside* man. He called Leon the plant manager. Leon was the *inside* man in charge of the whole washing operation . . . Luc was the *talker* and Leon was the *worker*" (169 Emphasis mine). Leon's image as an "inside man" and "worker" in his business relationship to Luc sheds light on his doubly oppressed position as an emasculated, exploited man. In the end, Leon's hardworking came to be unrewarded, like Grandpa

Leon's case, as Luc ran away with all the money. All in all, while one family tragedy (Mah's cheating on Leon with Tommie Hom) damages his masculinity in the domestic space, the other (the failure of Ong and Leong's) impairs it even further in the public space.

Both structurally and thematically Leon's life story would be read as an example of a failed *Bildungsroman* whose narrative projects him as a dispossessed individual. It is Patricia Alden who thematizes upward mobility as a prominent element of the English *Bildungsroman*. While reading English *Bildungsromane* written by Gissing, Hardy, Bennett, and Lawrence in the context of the German predecessors', Alden first points out that amongst the English successors' there is a separation of "inner cultivation" from "social and economic rise." That is to say, an economic success through an achievement of a right vocation had become the most important element of the genre flourishing on British soil, inasmuch as "the individual's pursuit of an ideal of self-development" had come to be achieved mostly by economic upward mobility (Alden 1). As she elaborates, the assumption is that an achievement of the particular upward mobility (represented as attaining material wealth and higher social status) would lead to one's ability to realize one's full human potential. In the course of Leon's *Bildung* narrative, Leon, however, failed to achieve upward mobility. At the same time, the development of his inner self appears to be a failure as well, insofar as his fatherhood is flawed by his wife's infidelity, his inability to support his family economically, and, most importantly, his first (biological) daughter's suicide.

What I would like to emphasize is Leon's failed *Bildung* narrative sheds light on destructive elements of liberalism, a political theory that still has its spells upon our

contemporary society. Grounded in bourgeois ideals of human dignity and individual freedom, both the *Bildungsroman* and liberalism conceive a “possessive individual” as their ideal subject. Conceptualized by C. B. Macpherson, “possessive individualism” refers to a theory in which an individual is conceived “as proprietor of his own person” while his freedom is supposedly created and maximized through “self-interested contractual relations with others.” Meanwhile, a society in this theory appears to consist of a series of free market relations (Macpherson 271-72). Central to possessive individualism is the liberalism’s belief in the dignities of the individuals’ free will to claim his/her possessions (freedoms, rights, properties, etc.). At the same time it is important to bear in mind, although the *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre rose concurrently with liberalism, a political and economic theory, the genre’s assumptions have been maneuvered by neo-liberalism’s reinforcing the ostensible myth of upward mobility without social reforms of the uneven and partial conditions. Believing that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade,” neo-liberal economic and political practices have only overemphasized the liberty of possessive individualism while annihilating the role of the nation-state in its citizens’ equal and unbiased accomplishment of possessive individualism (Harvey 2). In short, in the process of racialized liberalization and possessive-individuation of the privileged few, the regulation and the responsibility of the nation-state are obliterated, and it has, in turn, entailed considerable destruction of the freedom to plot (a progressive life story) of the underprivileged. Suffice it to say the racialized minority group’s state of dispossession is only aggravated with the state’s

paradigm shift from liberalism to neo-liberalism. In other words, Leon's failed *Bildung* narrative underscores liberalism's fundamental dilemma that the structure of supposedly "free" market society no longer provides, or has never provided, even conditions for all. As a member of the underprivileged group, Leon has not received adequate educational opportunities, let alone adequate housing or job opportunities.

Leon's eccentric character as a junk collector, unprofessional machine repairer, and amateur inventor demonstrates the uselessness of his skills in his possessive market society, as well as his poor educational background, and it thus aggravates his dispossessed status. As the novel constantly shows as a symptom of liberalism's worsening dilemma, Leon's hotel room is always packed with various kinds of garbage and broken machines, and Leon enjoys either fixing broken machines or inventing something by combining junks. As the novel shows, however, Leon's such skills are nearly useless in the sense that it does not have any cash value and it does not generate any profit for the family. Moreover, the moral debt Leon has come to permanently owe Grandpa Leong demonstrates something liberalism's free market relations cannot capture. As a consumer who bought a fictive identity as a paper son, Leon has been required to pay the price by paying off an economic debt (five thousand American dollars) on the one hand, and a moral debt (the promise to send Grandpa Leong's bones to China) on the other. Having purchased the citizenship, Leon paid off his monetary debt; however, his status is in danger of being an eternal debtor since Grandpa Leong's bones have been combined with other unclaimed bones, contained in a box, reburied, and therefore become unredeemable. The distress Leon has suffered and will suffer as an

eternal debtor would be neither represented nor encouraged by the system of liberalism's free markets.

By deploying Ona's suicide as a necessity of the narrative structure, *Bone* insinuates the overriding influences of the liberalism's destructive force. As the first biological daughter of Leon, Ona was his most favorite, the most beloved one. According to Chinese old-timers' belief, "the blood came from the mother and the bones from the father. Ona was part Leon and part Mah" (104). As Leila further explains, "Leon/Ona. *On* was part of Leon's Chinese name, too" (131 Emphasis original). As the novel portrays, Ona is Leon's alter ego; Ona's death thus evinces a symbolic death of Leon. Freud's theory of melancholia could be also understood as a symbolic death of the melancholic mourner in the sense that the melancholic develops a pathological identification with the object of the loss. Like Leon, Ona too was a melancholic subject; she literally suffered from depression and was on the drugs. After she died, Ona keeps haunting the remaining family as a "shadowy presence"; like Leon's figure in the domestic space, Ona's absence is constantly juxtaposed with her lingering presence (112). The premature death of Ona vis-à-vis the symbolic death of Leon reveals deadly consequences engendered by the broken promises of the U.S. nation-state. Only after Ona's death did Leon start to see the structural problem of all the family tragedies:

Leon was looking for someone to blame. All his old bosses. Every coworker that betrayed him. He blamed the whole maritime industry for keeping him out at sea for half his life. Finally he blamed all of America for making big promises and breaking every one. Where was the good job he'd heard as a young man? Where was the successful business? He'd kept his end of the bargain: he'd worked hard. Two jobs, three. Day and night. Overtime. Assistant laundry presser. Prep cook. Busboy. Waiter. Porter. But where was his happiness? "America," he ranted, "this lie of a country!" (104)

On the Verge of Dis/possession: Leila's Precarious Act of Writing

Suffice it to say, Leila's narrative of *Bildung*, looking into the past rather than the future, is also in danger of being nullified. By claiming that "I'm the stepdaughter of a paper son and I've inherited this whole suitcase of lies," Leila painfully yet voluntarily acknowledges a possible impact the earlier histories of marginalization could have upon her (61). Provided that she is by no means connected to Leon and/or Grandpa Leong by blood, what she has inherited are engendered by no less than a societal construction of race; if there is something she has inherited from her fictive ancestors, it is of more race relations rather than blood relations. Rendering the two family relationships (the father and son relationship between Grandpa Leong and Leon and the father and daughter relationship between Leon and Leila) not biological but fictive and random, Ng's *communal Bildungsroman* highlights the constructedness of race relations. Through the forced inheritance of racialized poverty and limited freedom to pursue autonomous selfhood, the two youths (Leon and Leila) are marginalized (in other words, staying as part of minority instead of becoming a "major"), having been prevented from creating a progressive developmental narrative.

In the context of previous discussion, I argue Ng's *Bildungsroman* revises the paradigm of the classical *Bildungsroman* in that the two transgressive (non-bourgeois and non-white) protagonists are required to challenge and disavow race relations, if not blood, for their own modern socialization. As an inheritor of race relations who is recording her coming-of-age story at the turn of the century when hierarchized race relations are supposedly rejected by the nation-state, Leila aspires to live a life different from the one

lived by her parents, and she believes the new generation deserves a better democracy: “Nina, Ona, and I, we’re the lucky generation. Mah and Leon forced themselves live through the humiliation in this country so that we could have it better” (35-36). As opposed to her such expectation, the narrative renders Leila as another possible victim of the accumulated family/national tragedies, temporarily precluded from the linear progression of the self. Throughout the text Leila’s act of recording the past (the histories of her predecessors and the story of Ona) is represented as her subversive strategy to write her own differential *Bildung* narrative. By writing the loss of the right to self-possession, of which has been stripped throughout the three generation of the Asian American family, Leila challenges the normative assumptions of the genre’s and the nation-state’s ostensibly universal subject.

Leila’s social world, as compared to that in the classical *Bildungsroman*, consists of two uncompromising spheres—her family and the nation-state—and this twofold society decisively provides dual conflicts the protagonist must overcome: the history of racialization as well as the history of Chinese Confucian ideologies, both of which have governed and restricted the subjectivity of her predecessors. As someone believes in humanistic, democratic promises of the nation-state—presumed to be equal and unbiased and thus supposedly deny any racialized and/or gendered social institutions—Leila seeks her ownership to possessive individualism. Nonetheless, the process of Leila’s subject formation, as the narrator’s memories display, has been marked by her parents whose fundamental beliefs are still based on the traditional Chinese culture. First of all, the novel explains the generational gap between the parents and the daughters as irreconcilable both culturally and linguistically. As Leila writes, “I have a whole different

vocabulary of feeling in English than in Chinese, and not everything can be translated” (18). While listening to Leila’s stories about her own personal struggles with her parents, readers would clearly see how Chinese cultural ideologies based on Confucianism have oppressed not only male subjectivity but also female subjectivity. If Leon has been threatened by his imaging of “ancestral retribution,” his daughters, as the inheritors of the Confucian, misogynist culture, have been forced to perform rigid gender roles that only allow them to be chaste, obedient women. When Nina had an abortion, Mah and Leon without considering her circumstance “ganged up on her, said awful things, made her feel like she was a disgrace. Nina was rotten, doomed, no-good. Good as dead” in their minds (25). They also blamed Leila who does not live by traditional Chinese feminine virtues. Mah said “how everything started with [Leila] since [she] was the first one, the eldest, the one with the daring to live with Mason when [she] wasn’t married” (41). Therefore, having been born and raised in the first-generation immigrant family in the U.S. where the two contrasting cultures collapse, the three daughters’ desire for progression—a desire to pursue an independent, autonomous selfhood—ironically meets the danger of regression—a danger of becoming a disgraced, disrespectful daughter.

In this regard, Ona’s radical decision (to commit suicide) could be understood as the only *choice* she could make in the wake of the generational conflict in order not to lose her autonomous selfhood. As Leila ponders, “it’d been Ona’s choice” although her choice was death, not “a new life” (15). The cultural conflict between the two generations is represented as two different, irreconcilable worlds. While speaking with Leila who was agonizing over her marriage, Nina says, “[Mah and Leon] have no idea what our lives are about. They don’t want to come into *our worlds*. We keep on having to live in *their*

world. They won't move one bit" (33 *Emphasis mine*). Nina's poignant remarks above all point to the incompatibility of the two worlds: one of the first-generation parents which has been tremendously marked by the U.S. history of racialization as well as of traditional Chinese culture, and the other of the second-generation children that aspires to disavow such a twofold social world of their parents. Moreover, the quote implies the parents occupying a separate "world" without showing any mobility, both cultural and economical, in effect exemplify one stage in the progression of the daughters' subject formation, and that the new generation ought to pass by the stage if they want to construct a possessive individualistic narrative. The incompatibility of the two worlds is also demonstrated by the ways Leila depicts the choice she has to make in order to survive between her old family and the new one: "It was being pulled back and forth between Mah and Mason. . . it was mostly Mah's being alone and Mason's waiting for me" (50). Resonating with the regressive choice Ona has made, the process of Leila's seeking her own progressive choice appears to readers painstaking as well as menacing.

Inasmuch as the family's loss of the middle daughter, Ona, has reinforced Leila's responsibility as the eldest daughter, Ona's death is represented as a surface obstacle Leila must overcome to achieve her progressive narrative. Not only does the middle sister's death literally prevent her from achieving marriage rites (moving back in with her husband and having a formal wedding banquet), but it does also psychologically prevent her from detaching herself from her old family. As Leila writes in recollection, the family's preparing for Ona's funeral right after the tragic event did not go smooth, specifically because "Ona jumped too close to the New Year" (106). As Leila explains, "[a]ll the Chinese funeral houses were shut down because of an old-world fear that it was

unlucky to touch death so close to the beginning of a new year,” and community people “were worried about attending a funeral so close to the festive days, afraid that death might follow them into the New Year” (107). Hence, the family had to delay the funeral; instead, they “tried to put [their] grief away for the holiday, for good luck” (114). More interesting is the mourning of the loss as a whole, as a psychological process that may take place before/during/after the funeral, has never been practiced, as it seems in Leila’s fuzzy recollection. In Chapter 10 where Leila painfully recollects the day of Ona’s belated funeral, the narrative demonstrates how the family, including herself, failed to overcome their grief: “I wasn’t ready to say goodbye to Ona. None of us were ready” (129). Leila’s remarks in Chapter 1 (that supposedly displays her most recent consciousness), “Ona has become a kind of silence in our lives. We don’t talk about her,” proves the unresolved grief in that the family is still unable to enter the process of mourning in the present time. Accordingly, readers can conjecture the family’s mourning of Ona’s death as a psychological journey to overcome the loss and then to reincorporate back to society has been unconditionally postponed, so much so Leila wanted a marriage without a wedding ceremony. To clarify, Leila knew that Mah would want a formal wedding banquet for her marriage, but what is more urgent to Leila was, as she acknowledges, “a ritual to *forget*” (the death/the past) rather than a ritual to *celebrate* (a new life/the future) (54 Emphasis mine). In particular, Leila’s unresolved grief is demonstrated through physical pains as seen in Chapter 4 where she drinks a ginger brew Mah made for her: “I sipped. My shoulders felt tight, tense. I tried to relax them, but when I turned my head, it felt like someone was stabbing me in the back. Nothing new. For months, I had these pains” (49-51). If Leon became the melancholic subject in his

pathological mourning for Grandpa Leong, Leila too becomes a melancholic mourner for Ona's premature death and thus highlights her vulnerable position as the inheritor of her (step)father's unresolved grief.

In Leila's painstaking process of overcoming Ona's death, or the loss of her right to self-possession in a broader sense, the narrative constantly juxtaposes the strategies of *forgetting* and *remembering*. Throughout the text, Leila is agonized by her conflicting desires to forget—and to remember—the past, and thus her *Bildung* narrative is tremendously affected by her inside battle between progressive and regressive forces: “*Forward and forward and then back, back*” (145 Emphasis original). Despite the fact that the narrative is organized by a reverse chronology, readers following Leila's consciousness seeking to recollect events in the past would notice a psychological progression of her thoughts, through which Leila has come to appreciate the importance of remembering. At the outset of her mental journey, she confesses “[w]hat [she] wanted was to forget” rather than to remember because she wanted to escape the “blame” and the “pressing fear” (54). As her consciousness progresses with the recollection of the past, Leila has gradually noticed forgetting the past was neither possible nor desirable for her moving forward: “I remember everything. Mason's right. I never forget . . . All I have are those memories, and I want to remember them all” (61). And in the end, Leila's consciousness reaches a resolution as she realizes “[r]emembering the past gives power to the present” (89).

Through the process of writing the loss of the three-generation family's right to self-possession, Leila creates a communal *Bildung* narrative while modifying the classical patterns of the genre. Leila's self-assured claiming of the U.S. history of racialization as

her own inheritance (“I’m the stepdaughter of a paper son and I’ve inherited this whole suitcase of lies”) transgresses the genre’s political assumption that all individual is free to break from generational continuity on the one hand, and the nation-state’s ostensible promise of the American Dream, publicly denying the restrictions of predetermined circumstances, on the other. As Leila writes, seeking the freedom to pursue a life story for a daughter of the underprivileged Asian American family, however, could not be accomplished without acknowledging her inheritance of the limited freedom of self-possession, which arises as not only a family tragedy, but also a national tragedy. In the context of the self-proclaimed role of the U.S. nation-state as a protector of individuals’ equal freedom and a guarantor of liberalism’s possessive individualism, the narrative in Ng’s *communal Bildungsroman* is indeed subversive in the sense that it points to the nation-state’s failure to recognize the systematic inheritance of oppressive race relations in the (re)production of Asian American subjectivities.

CHAPTER III

SINGING A “PAEAN TO RACE TRANSCENDENCE”:

ERIC LIU’S ASSIMILATIVE *BILDUNGSROMAN* AND THE LOGIC OF DILUTION

Mason looks good in the sun. Summer or winter, Mason always looks good. He smells good too. He always has that faint metal smell in his hair. Looking at Dale, I thought he looked pretty good, with his surfer’s build, his tennis-tanned legs, and his perfect hair-cut. His house, his business, and even his smooth English all counted for something, but I knew I could never go with a guy like him. A guy with an uncalled smooth palm, a guy with Sunday hands.
—Leila’s monologue in *Bone*

Most of the women I have encountered in my life have been white. Most, but not all, of those I have found attractive have also been white. And most who found me attractive were white as well. What does this all mean? What *should* it mean? How much of this pattern is chance? How much, the product of unseen forces?
—Liu, *The Accidental Asian*

There was a moment in Ng’s *Bone* (1994) where Leila compares Mason—her soon-to-be husband—and Mason’s cousin, Dale, as the couple visits Aunt Lily’s house. Located right after the marriage proposal scene, the moment, although short, exhibits a thought process through which Leila navigates the world of shifting identities between self and other in making her voluntary decision for her spouse. To her, Mason is someone she could easily identify with. Like Leila, he grew up in Chinatown, so they both are familiar with the community; like her parents, he as a car mechanic earns his living, doing a manual labor. In short, as Leila puts it, “[Mason] was one of us” (Ng 19). Although both Mason and Dale are American-born Chinese, Dale, on the other hand, occupies the world of the Other. Unlike the couple, Dale “went to an all-white school,” and he, who “sounds so white,” as Mason complains, belongs to a higher social class (Ng 43). Ng’s portrait of the two male characters of the same ethnicity suggests a fissure that

could develop within social categories of identity, and this fissure is central to Leila's decision making when she announces that "I could never go with a guy like [Dale]" (Ng 45). This practice of imagining, and distancing, the other ultimately leads to Leila's *communal* self-fashioning of her identity by establishing closer ties with Mason, her stepfather Leon, and the Chinatown community.

Published only a few years after *Bone*, Eric Liu's *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* (1998) also portrays the author's navigating the world of shifting identities. While utilizing the fissure in racial identities, Liu comes to assert his "white" identity through the model of assimilation. Liu's self-conscious denial of Asian American communal memory and his assimilationist instinct to sand away what American society considers racial differences constitute his "paean to race transcendence" (Liu 153). The strategies used in Liu's subject formation are quite opposite to Leila's. As a counterpart of each other, Liu and Dale surprisingly look alike, and they represent a significant number of Asian Americans whose "first generation arrived with considerable built-in advantages of class, education, and expectations," as Liu puts it in depicting his parents (158). What may ultimately be most interesting about juxtaposing Ng's and Liu's quotes is, the slippage between race and class, or, more specifically, the power of *class* the quotes display to the individuals' self-fashioning of social identity. In the multicultural U.S. society, the racial hierarchies supposedly no longer exist, so much so citizens—like the protagonist in the classical European *Bildungsroman*—are considered "free" to make individualistic choices regarding who we are, whom we marry, and with whom we create communities. Liu's book containing the narrative of assimilation of a "banana" (an Asian

who has become “white inside”) not only foregrounds but also exemplifies the ideal world.

An autobiography written by a second-generation Chinese-American, Liu’s *The Accidental Asian* records various moments of turning points from the author’s life, including the Liu family’s immigration. While Liu opens his autobiography with the story of the death of his Chinese father with a section entitled “Song for My Father,” he ends the narrative with “Blood Vows” where Liu recollects his marriage to a Jewish American woman, Carroll Haymon. By commingling the autobiographical narrative with grief memoir, Liu transforms the traditional narrative form of the *Bildungsroman*. In effect, Liu’s text generates a self-possessive subject as an outcome of the assimilation progress from the son of the Chinese immigrant family to the father figure of an American interracial nuclear family. While providing the chronological process of how the author has smoothly completed assimilation into “white” mainstream America, Liu’s coming-of-age is incisively structured according to a dynamics of gaining and losing, remembering and forgetting, as well as a process of both identification and disidentification.

An offspring of a Taiwanese immigrant and manager at IBM, Liu projects an ideal multicultural, anti-racist society where one is encouraged to—and truly *can*—self-fashion an identity regardless of one’s respective race. “[Y]ou don’t have to have white skin anymore to become white,” writes Liu (162). Liu’s use of “white” as two different adjectives here—the former refers to a phenotypic marker while the latter is used as an affluent, influential social category—is worth noting, and the possibility of the distinction

between the two is crucial to Liu's *assimilative Bildung* narrative.³ As the title of his book suggests, Liu's narrative asserts the accidentality of race by pointing to the liberties of a multicultural and raceless society. In writing his autobiography Liu deploys the structure of the *Bildungsroman*, a literary device designed for narrating the development of an individual from a restless youth to a mature citizen. The genre's conventional structure truly has a special benefit for the author who aspires to be "white inside" and, therefore, has the imperative to distinguish himself from various stereotypes of Asian otherness. For the structure—traditionally designed to depict the process of modern socialization as the result of the protagonist's seeking a harmonious fusion of his desire for particularities and society's demands—fits the author who voluntarily strives to relinquish the Asian otherness particularly through assimilating into the bourgeois "white" mainstream culture. While projecting a harmonious fusion of the second-generation Asian American subject's personal choice and the U.S. nation-state's idealized form of subjectivity, Liu's text manifests an Asian American achievement of possessive individualism.

In particular, Liu's literary manifestation of possessive individualization is achieved through the author's transcending his respective race mainly through possession, consumption, and intermarriage. While recollecting and re-writing the stories of his parents' migration, his adolescent and college years, his marriage, and then his fatherhood, Liu proposes his individual interpretation of race throughout his text. His individual—or rather individualistic—envisioning of race is crucial to the reconciliation the protagonist needs, in order to achieve the particular individual's modern socialization.

³ In order to avoid confusion, the rest of this chapter will use a pair of quote marks when I refer to "white" as an affluent, influential social category.

In the case of young Liu who is the “social immigrant”—a term Liu uses to categorize someone like him who is an ABC (American-born Chinese)—modern socialization was an assimilation derived from Jews and Jewishness (44). In particular, Liu had to assert the randomness of race (i.e. “Chineseness” as “nothing” or “Asian American identity” as a “contrived” mirage, as the author insists) so as to affirm his “Americanness.” Only through the process does Liu successfully overcome the conflict between individuation and socialization and, in turn, demonstrates a harmonious fusion of the two. By presenting the Liu’s arduous process of assimilation which took the whole two generations, *The Accidental Asian* finally grants young Liu that fusion: a completed assimilation of *his own choice*. “I was raised, in short, to assimilate, to claim this place as mine . . . As a function of my parents’ own half-conscious, half-finished acculturation,” Liu goes on to write, “I grew up feeling that my life was Book II of an ongoing saga” (37).

Worth noting is the assimilation is not forced, but chosen by the “social immigrant” consciously and strategically, as Liu claims. The narrative’s emphasis on “choice” is central to Liu’s adaptation of *Bildung* within his own particular circumstance. Conventionally referring to an individual’s humanistic development within the world, *Bildung* is the idealist name for the ultimate task of subject/citizen in that *Bildung*’s work is to reconcile revolutionary individuals and the regulatory nation-state. Liu’s autobiographical *Bildungsroman* re-defines *Bildung*, above all, as the assimilation into the bourgeois “white” mainstream culture, therefore it accommodates the U.S. liberal nation-state’s disremembering of social inequalities intersecting race and class. In addition, Liu’s text underscores the agency of the “social immigrant” in the process of

assimilation while utilizing the language of “choice.” The protagonist’s achievement of *Bildung* is thus represented not only as societal “success” but also as his attainment of the freedom to choose his culture (the customs and predilection of WASPy Americans), social race (“white inside”), and spouse (intermarriage). Indeed, readers, as they follow Liu’s written monologue, would see a self-determined, convinced “white” citizen who is qualified enough economically, culturally, and psychologically for the ownership for his adopted racial identity. As a Yale and Harvard graduate, Liu has achieved material competence, working for the federal government, the State Department, and the White House; he has also internalized the patriotic rhetoric. As a self-proclaimed “Native Speaker,” Liu asserts a full belonging to his nation while denying he belongs both to the worlds of his nation and his parents’ original homeland. Liu remarks, “I’m not sure I would want to be a middleman, a mediator (between the U.S. and China) in disputes political or commercial . . . What I *would* want to be is, oh, say, the U.S. ambassador to China. Now, that’s a role I’d relish: representing my nation, its interests, its value” (138). The quote is only one example that shows the choice narrative Liu self-consciously deploys in writing his autobiographical *Bildungsroman*. As a marker signifying the subject’s ability of self-possession, the language of choice bears witness to the author’s autonomous agency in making decisions, both public and private: “I *chose*. I chose to enter a relationship with Carroll,” writes Liu in “Blood Vows” (183 Emphasis original).

The Accidental Asian predicated on a raceless society puts the choice narrative forward and allows the protagonist a full access to the democratic rhetoric. Liu’s text thus seems to demonstrate the eventuality of an Asian American achievement of possessive individualism, which had been prevented until the 1940s mainly due to a series of

immigrant exclusion acts. The U.S. administration of citizenship from 1850 to the 1940s demonstrates Asian immigrant personhood and capacities had been socially construed as different from those of white male citizens. Up until the repeal acts of 1943-1952, the bar to citizenship remained for Asian men, restricting Asian immigrant possessive individualization. In particular, Asian men's freedom to marry and to form a nuclear family has been institutionally restricted by a series of gendered exclusion acts. For instance, the Page Law of 1875 and a consequent ban on the spouses of Chinese laborers had effectively resulted in a very small number of Chinese immigrant women; moreover, female citizens are to lose their U.S. citizenship if married an "alien ineligible to citizenship."⁴ Given the history of racialized and gendered immigrant exclusion acts, Liu's attempt to assert an Asian American coming-of-age—both literary and political—through possession, consumption, and intermarriage underscores an individual freedom to determine one's fortune and future—such as one's spouse—which had not been granted to Asian immigrant men up until the mid-twentieth century.⁵ Provided that my reading of Ng's *Bone* in the previous chapter (which also has "social immigrants" as its *Bildungsroman* protagonist) demonstrates the ways in which the later generation living in the age of *le jure* inclusion still experience obstacles to the American democratic ideals, Liu's assured deployment of the choice narrative is, I believe, worth examining.

⁴ According to Lowe's *Immigrant Acts*, the number of Chinese women in the U.S. throughout the nineteenth century did not exceed five thousand, or 7 percent off the total Chinese population (187).

⁵ Lowe, 11. The Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943 constituted the Chinese immigrant subject as exclusively "male"; in the 1946 modification of the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act, the Chinese spouses of U.S. citizens were exempted from the annual quota.

In this chapter, I aim to investigate how the protagonist's class privilege functions in the Asian American subject's self-fashioning of himself as a free, convinced citizen. More specifically, I examine how the protagonist and autobiographer, precisely due to his class position, challenges the imperative of race relations, and then fabricates the logic of dilution. Central to the protagonist's achievement of *Bildung*—which in turn allows the construction of autonomous selfhood—is the protagonist's invention of the dilution theory. As the author attests, a way for him to attain “whiteness” as social power is to *dilute* his Chinese givens: “I have, as I say, allowed my Chinese ethnicity to become diluted” (55). Metaphorically related to the normative American identity which, in Werner Sollors' paradigm, favors the language of *consent* over that of *descent*, Liu's blood theory obviously acknowledges the societal power of race relations, yet at the same time asserts a malleability of the social construct. The logic of dilution here is grounded in his individualistic conceptualization of race. First of all, Liu strategically interprets race and/or ethnicity (such as the two terms, “Chineseness” or “Americanness,” he uses liberally throughout the text) mainly as cultural commodities rather than substances. I further argue, in order to generate an harmonious fusion of individuation and socialization, young Liu's *Bildung* narrative aggressively re-defines the ascriptive—his biological, ethnic, and/or racial givens—as “accidental,” and, more importantly, as something one can willfully and selectively choose rather than forcedly inherit. Liu asks the question at the outset, “Where does this Chineseness reside?” (7). As an upper-class ABC who did not directly experience any exclusionary law or societal disadvantage, Liu questions “Chineseness” that has afflicted the Americans of Chinese descent (regardless of class) and has influenced the American stereotypes of Asian otherness. Through the

rest of his *assimilative Bildungsroman*, Liu strives to create his individualistic answers. On the one hand, Chineseness to him is “anything, everything, and ultimately nothing” (31). On the other, it also signifies family memories, customs, and language, which, Liu believes, his children should not feel forced to adopt: “I cannot imagine requiring [my children] to be very Chinese or not at all Chinese. I will give *them* the choice” (197).

In addition to the acquisitional race, the incompatibility of “Americanness” and “Chineseness” is also fundamental to the construction of Liu’s autobiographical self. As the narrative progresses, the presence of Liu’s Chinese ancestry is gradually dismissed and is exchanged by Liu’s envisioning of his new, chosen family with Carroll. By the loss of Chinese ancestry, I do not, however, simply mean the death of his Chinese father and/or grandmother. Rather, it denotes various cultural aspects that Liu has inherited from his Chinese ancestry. Not only does Liu mourn the death of his old family (Baba and Popo), but he does also lament the loss of Chinese language, for instance. Moreover, Liu’s *assimilative Bildungsroman* engenders two magnetic poles—the Chinatown in Manhattan where Liu’s unassimilated grandmother lives and the Liu family’s suburb home in Poughkeepsie, New York. Consequently, I investigate how Liu in the writing process constructs an autobiographical self as an American democratic selfhood not only through the acquisition of “whiteness” but also through the loss of “Chineseness.” To the Chinese-American who is not racially white, becoming “white, by acclamation,” was possible because such notions as whiteness and Chineseness hinge on cultural aspects, not on an essentialist notion of race (34). I examine this narrative of assimilation into whiteness while keeping an eye on both the autobiographical part of the text where Liu

celebrates his autonomous self and the subtext of this autobiography where Liu grieves the loss of his Chinese ancestry.

In depicting the process through which the author has achieved assimilation, Liu's *Bildungsroman* transforms the traditional structure of the novel of subject formation by mixing it with two other literary forms: autobiography and grief memoir. This narrative strategy was crucial to the author's producing "the sovereign self," the autobiographical subject whose central interest is the self, which is tantamount to the classical *Bildungsroman* protagonist (Smith and Watson 3). Though two seemingly disparate genres, the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, above all, share commonalities. As a practice of self-referential writing, the genre of autobiography, like the *Bildungsroman*, is closely tied to the history of Euro-American history of Enlightenment. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson provide the origin of the term *autobiography* in the context of the early modern period in the West: "Privileged as the definitive achievement of a mode of life narrative, 'autobiography' celebrates the autonomous individual and the universalizing life history" (3). There is an evident analogy between the two genres—the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography—for both are, above all, the literary devices that are quintessentially grounded in the belief in liberalism and valorize a modern subject as a democratic, autonomous individual. While fusing the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, Liu's *The Accidental Asian* offers an account of the self's modern socialization by the self in the sense that Liu becomes at once the author and protagonist of the narrative of his subject formation. Hence, the author of this particular *Bildungsroman* surely has the privilege to

control the narrative in recollecting his life history. At the outset of the text, Liu shows no hesitation to acknowledge his desire and ability to re-construct his memories in order for his individualistic self-fashioning. Liu writes:

My knowledge of Baba's years in China and Taiwan is like a collection of souvenirs . . . [S]ifting through them, I cannot be sure whether the story they tell is simply the story I've chosen to imagine. If I were a fiction writer, I could manipulate these scenes a hundred different ways. I could tell you a tale and pass it off as emblematic of Baba's childhood, of wartime China, of the Chinese condition. Even as an essayist, I impute significance to the scenes in a way that reveals as much about my yearnings as it does about my father's. It is the Heisenberg principle of remembrance: the mere act of observing a memory changes that memory's meaning. (9)

Liu's remarks here, however, not only show the autobiographer's desire—as well as a certain capacity—to “manipulate” language to suit his “yearnings” to get a sense of who he is, but also shed light on the constructed aspect of recollecting. As Liu tellingly records, “observing a memory,” undeniably leading to another act of re-presenting it with language, changes the “meaning” of the event—If not the event *per se*—which in turn affects the author's identity. Hence, the autobiographer in this sense interestingly becomes at once the producer and product of language in the act of writing, as opposed to the case of the *Bildungsroman* which necessitates the separation of the protagonist from the writer. This particular structure of Liu's *Bildungsroman* (the protagonist himself writing his subject formation) is definitely not only advantageous to the protagonist's self-fashioning of himself but also symptomatic of the subject's privileged position. Nonetheless, recent scholars of autobiography have focused more on the nature of the reciprocal relationship between subjecthood and language. As opposed to a traditional view of autobiography that holds a belief that an autobiographical self controls language to record one's life stories which already exist as an entity, these critics shed light on the

role of language in the formation of an autobiographical self. For instance, with reference to Paul De Man's thesis that "the self is constituted by language and therefore cannot transcend it," Paul John Eakin argues that the autobiographical self is no longer a cause of language but a profound effect of it (191). In reading Liu's autobiography, I agree with Eakin's argument inasmuch as I see "the sovereign self" emerge gradually, as I follow the ways in which Liu (re)constructs his memories in retrospect.

In addition to Liu's deployment of the autobiographical narrative, the author's use of the narrative of grief is also pivotal to how the text generates the birth of a liberal, self-possessive individual. Although I would not claim that mourning is the heart of Liu's autobiography, its subtext—grieving the losses of his father and his grandmother—is worth noting in relation to Liu's generic interventions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. As critics have pointed out, writing a grief memoir is interrelated to the (re)construction of selfhood, inasmuch as the major goal of grief memoirist is to compose "a new postloss identity" while making sense of the death of a closest person (Fowler 539). In other words, through mourning the death of the deceased could the remained manage to detach oneself from the loss, and then to (re)incorporate into society. The detachment of oneself from the loss is central to the grief memoirist's main task (the construction of a "postloss" identity), and the economy between the old and the new here, inversely proportional, resonates with the *Bildungsroman*'s structural economy (the old vs. the youth, and innocence vs. maturity). To elaborate, Liu's portrayal of his "postloss" identity through the mourning of his father in "Song for My Father," thus signals the author's successful and healthy detachment from his father. Liu's mourning is an antithesis to the pattern of "melancholia" that I examined in reading Ng's *Bone* with reference to Freudian model of

“mourning and melancholia.” In Ng’s novel, Leila’s stepfather, Leon, fails to detach himself from the series of losses—from his beloved daughter, Ona, to democratic ideals—and thus comes to reproach himself for the losses. However, his melancholia was caused by his racialized status as a “paper” son who could not pay back his moral debt to his “paper” father, Grandpa Leong. If Leon, who fails to incorporate into the nation-state by occupying an indefinite stage in the course of his liberal subject formation, exemplifies Freudian “melancholic” subject, Liu’s writing of “Song for My Father” and locating it at the very first section of his autobiographical *Bildungsroman* manifests Freudian normative “mourning” through which the author celebrates his “postloss” identity. The particular structure of *The Accidental Asian* (the combination of grief memoir and autobiography) is truly an effective cross-genre for the author who aims to claim his “white,” self-possessive social identity. The structure enables the author’s logic of dilution central to his *assimilative Bildungsroman*: Liu’s acquisition of “whiteness” and the birth of the American autonomous selfhood alike are achieved simultaneously with Liu’s loss of Chineseness.

Liu’s autobiography redeploying the structure of the *Bildungsroman* consists of seven essays. While each essay has its particular focus relating to the author’s struggle to get a sense of who he is and to challenge racial/ethnic labels, the essays as a whole projects a teleological, progressive narrative of an Asian American assimilation. In particular, the first, second, fourth, and seventh chapters, roughly arranged in a chronological order, depict the family histories of the Lius. More importantly, I suggest they all be, above all, intended to carefully design the person who writes: “Song for My Father” explains the origin of young Liu’s birth, inasmuch as it records the history of his

parents' migration and the story of their marriage; "Notes of a Native Speaker" depicts young Liu's troubled years in high school and college where he initially started noticing the social power of racial markers and striving to possess the white dominant culture; "The Chinatown Ideas" further accentuates young Liu's assimilation as it contrasts the youth to his grandmother who was an epitome of an unassimilated Chinese immigrant; "Blood Vows" proclaims the self-possession of young Liu, now fully assimilated, as he finally comes to control the language of choice even over the ascriptive; and the rest (the third, fifth and sixth chapters) is composed mainly to interrogate Asian American categories and stereotypes.

Liu's seeking the narrative of assimilation is tremendously marked by the conflict between his desire to self-invent his identity and the societal difficulty to transcend ascriptive markers (i.e. American stereotypes of Asian otherness) which prevent Liu's absolute self-invention. And it is the conflict between *consent* and *descent*, in Sollors' terms, that compels grown-up Liu to reflect upon his yearning for a resolution, a lifelong process that has been defining his American social identity. As Sollors points out in *Beyond Ethnicity*, an American identity is above all characterized by the conflict between *consent* and *descent* in the sense that the U.S. stresses one's free abilities to build our own fates while it has simultaneously created several myths of descent-related determinism (such as Anglo-Saxonism and various kinds of racisms). Unlike Leila's case, Liu's parents who migrated to the U.S. in the mid-twentieth century did not experience the legislative exclusion; there is also class difference between the two in the sense that Liu's parents came to the states to attend universities and, then, became professionals. It is important to note, however, that the historical binary of "Asian" and "American" still

affects the subject formation of the privileged second-generation Asian American.

Although the binary does not exist as a legislative form any longer, the narrator as an Asian American subject feels the urge to disapprove of Asian otherness, inferiority, and disloyalty. In “Notes of a Native Speaker,” the second section of his *assimilative Bildungsroman*, Liu explains the particular conflict he encountered as an Asian American subject:

I was keenly aware of the unflattering mythologies that attach to Asian Americans: that we are indelibly foreign, exotic, math and science geeks, numbers people rather than people people, followers and not leaders, physically frail but devious and sneaky, unknowable and potentially treacherous. These stereotypes of Asian otherness and inferiority were like immense blocks of ice sitting before me, challenging me to chip away at them. And I did, tirelessly. (50)

Being keenly aware that he is often viewed as different—i.e. a “Chinese boy,” “a one-dimensional nerd,” “a geek” “an Asian nerd” or “another Asian overachiever”—in the eyes of Americans, young Liu, as he confessed throughout the text, has constantly struggled to defy the stereotypes of the Asian American male (43; 160). In this regard, Liu’s act of writing his *assimilative Bildungsroman*—through which the narrator comes to proclaim his “whiteness” and “Americanness”—is in continuation of the author’s lifelong personal battle to challenge the national construction of the binary of “Asian” and “American.”

The clash between *consent* (Liu’s desire to self-fashion his identity) and *descent* (the American stereotypes of Asian otherness) necessitates Liu’s including the story of his father’s migration at the outset of his *Bildungsroman*. The strategic mixing of the father and son’s two different stories enables the protagonist to challenge the substance of Chineseness and, then, to showcase an Asian American racial passing as “white.” Liu notes:

When Chao-hua Liu (Liu's father) came to the United States in 1955, at the age of eighteen, he was Chinese. When he died thirty-six years later, he was, I'd say, something other than Chinese. And he had helped raise a son who was Chinese in perhaps only a nominal sense. But what, ultimately, does all this mean? Where does this Chineseness reside? In the word? In the deed? In what is learned—or what is already known? And how is it passed from one generation to the next? Some of the answers lie, I know, in a book I'm still unable to read. But there are other answers, I suspect, in a book I must now begin to write. (7)

This quote from "Song for my Father" illuminates young Liu's shrewd objective to retell his father's story as part of his own *Bildungsroman*. By interrogating "Chineseness" that has been passed onto him from his father—if any—Liu strives to first understand the substance of the ethnic category that has been partially defining his social identity. The pivotal conflict in Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman* is the one between acquisitional whiteness and inherited Chineseness. Hence, like other *Bildungsroman* protagonists, Liu looks for a resolution of the conflict, yet the autobiographical self does so first by re-constructing the life history of his father. In essence, Liu aims to challenge the rigid, essentialist notion of race by re-writing his father's assimilation, although only "half-finished," as Liu points out (35). As Liu retells, his father was one of the few first-generation Chinese immigrants who had become "something other than Chinese" by quickly adapting to the "white" mainstream culture. A symbol of an intermediate immigrant existing between Liu's grandmother, Popo (the unassimilated) and young Liu (the assimilated), Chao-hua is represented as the one who initiated the process of dilution yet had not fully completed assimilation. Despite the fact that Liu strives to project his father as an "atypical" Chinese immigrant who "didn't fit anybody's stereotype of 'Chinese character'" and thus exemplifies an Americanized immigrant, Chao-hua, I argue, rather comes to represent the contradiction between Americanness and Chineseness which have been historically considered incompatible (11). Chao-hua's presence was

necessary for young Liu's fabrication of the theory of dilution and for the next generation's completion of assimilation; however, Chao-hua as the symbol of the incompatible poles had to face a tragic end, as the narrative goes to expose his premature death.

Liu retells the story of his father's "half-finished acculturation" before talking about his own *Bildung* narrative (35). This generational narrative structure is not accidental at all, for only in doing so could Liu make his self-invention more credible. In order to interrogate the substance of race ("Where constitutes Chineseness?"; "What is typically Chinese?"; and "What is typically American?") which actively involve with, and interrupt, his individualistic self-invention, Liu had to first investigate his father's Chineseness. For if Liu, the "social immigrant," happens to retain any Chineseness, it must have been passed on to him from the older generation. In "Song for My Father," the author pictures an image of his father while looking at an old black-and-white photograph in a memorial book compiled by close friends of his father:

In the center of the picture is my father, sitting at a desk with stacks of papers and books. He is leaning back slightly in a stiff wooden chair, his left leg crossed, and he is reading a book that rests easily on his knee. He is wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with ILLINOIS and a Stars and Stripes shield. He is smoking a pipe, which he holds to his mouth absently with his right hand.

When I first saw this picture, it put me in mind of a daguerreotype image I'd once seen of an 1890s Yale student sitting in his room . . . Yet for all the obvious differences in scene, there was, in both my father and that long-ago Yalie, the same self-conscious manner. *We are Serious Young Men*, their contemplative poses announce, and *we are preparing for the Future*. (12)

By juxtaposing the image of his father and a Yalie, Liu strategically introduces his father to his readers. As he goes on to comment on the photograph which the readers could not see through their eyes, his father looks "[n]ot quite so Chinese," but rather like the WASPy Yalie (12). Obviously, the ways Liu conceptualizes Chineseness here are

exclusively based on cultural aspects (such as what Chao-hua wears and how he poses) rather than phenotypical markers (physical attributes such as face, hair, and body). As Liu turns his gaze to another photograph where he finds his parents' wedding scene, his evaluation of Chao-hua's transformative race/ethnicity becomes more convinced: "To your average citizen of rural Michigan, this slight, black-haired couple probably looked like exchange students or tourists: like foreigners. *To me, they look heartbreakingly American* (13 Emphasis mine). Liu's use of the contrasting terms ("foreigners" vs. "American") shows the author's awareness of the tension between ascriptive and acquisitional ethnicity. To put differently, this is what Sollors refers to as the tension between *consent* and *descent*, which not only constructs an American ethnicity but also demonstrates the paradox of it. Liu's remarks that his newly-wed parents look "heartbreakingly American" consciously highlights the freedom and ability for his immigrant parents to become "American," if they claim to be. As opposed to "average" Michiganians who would determine one's ethnicity from the ascriptive, Liu willfully underlines the democratic, consent-based nature of an American ethnicity.

By pointing to his father's becoming of "something other than Chinese," Liu consciously emphasizes the malleability of ethnic and racial identities; however, I want to highlight that Liu's democratic, consent-based perspective of race/ethnicity is still predicated on the incompatibility of Americanness and Chineseness (7). To be sure, the author could create the narrative of assimilation (becoming American) only through the narrative of dilution (un-becoming Chinese). The economy of this dual narrative, inversely proportional, is suggestive for it sheds light on the natures of assimilation whereby one not only includes but also excludes a set of cultural otherness; the more

Chinese, the less American, and the less Chinese, the more American. Consequently, by utilizing ethnic/racial identities (Chineseness, Americanness, and whiteness) Liu's text redeploys the conventional *Bildungsroman* structure that depicts the progression from a restless youth to a civilized adult. In Liu's assimilative *Bildungsroman*, Chineseness happens to be represented as a symbol of uncivilized, innocent, immature youth while Americanness exemplifies a civilized, mature, normative citizen.

To Liu, his father nullifies the notion of ascriptive Chineseness, far from exemplifying it, and that is by and large the reason why he believes Chao-hua could have achieved acculturation, although "half-finished." Liu repeatedly remarks that his father, a "social dynamo" and "pushy underdog," was different than any other Chinese immigrants of his generation, by being "outgoing, loud, backslapping, playful" (22). In addition, another major reason why Liu thinks that his father "wasn't" quite like other Chinese" is Baba's proficient English skills. Liu remarks:

I think Baba's facility with English is part of what gave me such a powerful sense when I was growing up that he wasn't quite like other Chinese immigrants. Other Chinese immigrants, it seemed, spoke English as if it was Chinese, using *he* and *she* interchangeably, ignoring the conjugation of verbs, not bothering to make nouns plural. My father's English was several tiers better than that; more importantly, he spoke the language with relish, *as if he owned it*. (15 Emphasis mine)

With the possessive language, Liu creates the feeling that Chao-hua was a native speaker as if the first-generation immigrant "owned" English as a cultural competence.

Nonetheless, Liu's representation of his father as a fluent English speaker is not only subjective but also relational. First of all, the following lines, "I remember being surprised once when a friend said something about the Chinese inflection of my father's English . . . I simply didn't hear his accent," shed another light on the conflict between

the ascriptive and the acquisitional, as in the case of his parents' wedding photograph (15). To clarify, young Liu focuses on the acquisitional (English which his father has acquired as the second language) while his native friend unwittingly catches the ascriptive (Chinese accent). In this regard, the task to compare his parents with other "typical" Chinese immigrants is truly strategic since it magically renders the Lius relatively closer to Americanness than Chineseness. However, what young Liu is blind to is the fact that his parents could speak English better than other contemporary Chinese immigrants by virtue of their higher educational background. More to the point, the immigrant couple's choice not "to act Chinese" is inescapably grounded in their class position and, therefore, is not granted to lower-class Chinese immigrant family, such as Leila's parents in Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*. In other words, Liu's interpretation of Chineseness and Americanness are predicated on his parents' cultural capital rather than their race/ethnicity. This malleable notion of race is also evident in the author's explanation of whiteness at the outset of "Notes of a Native Speaker." Quite provocatively, Liu attests that even though he is not racially white, he can be "white" by culturally consuming "white" culture, for instance, by "wear[ing] Khaki Dockers," "own[ing] brown suede bucks," "furnish[ing his] condo à la Crate & Barrel," and "marr[ying] a white woman" (33). In this paradigm, a race/ethnicity concept (such as Chineseness and Americanness) becomes an empty container which one can furnish with whatever he would like to or whatever he can afford. "What is Chineseness?" Liu finally claims, "It is anything, everything, and ultimately nothing" (31).

Liu's malleable re-conceptualizations of Chineseness and Americanness were possible mainly because Liu associates his Chinese ancestry with a matter of

identification—a cultural identity a person *performs*—rather than that of ascription—a racial identity a person biologically inherits. Liu’s consent-exclusive theory of race/ethnicity creates a resonance with Sollors’ claim, “American ethnicity, then, is a matter not of content, but of the importance that individuals ascribe to it” (35). Indeed, including the history of Chao-hua’s performance of becoming American is crucial to the narrative of young Liu’s assimilation. For the eventuality of his father’s transformation poses a significant question concerning Liu’s being that falls under the contested process of ascription and identification: “Where does this Chineseness (that makes Liu “Chinese”) reside?” (7). After re-telling his father’s life, Liu’s quest for his parents’ Chineseness savvily refuses the essentialist notion of race. Liu writes, “Chinese isn’t a mystical, more authentic way of being; it’s just a decision to *act* Chinese” (10 Emphasis mine).

Liu’s painstaking effort to exterminate descent-based race/ethnicity concepts may gesture towards an anti-racist urge to negate biological essentialism. However, Liu’s seemingly anti-racist narrative has two inherent problems due to the ways in which Liu re-conceptualizes “whiteness.” First, his wholesale abandoning of Chineseness based on the progressive notion of race prematurely denies the presence of race in the U.S. that is still at work with other Chinese as a disadvantage, rather than a fair starting point. If a racial/ethnic identity is truly a cultural commodity one can “own,” as Liu boldly argued, it would be only economically competent immigrants who can purchase it in order to be part of “whiteness.” Hence, Chineseness as “an anything, everything and ultimately nothing” becomes only applicable for those economically competent immigrants who successfully overcome the national contradiction between the ascriptive and the

acquisitional. Accordingly, Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman* sheds light on the role of class when it comes to the possibility of "race transcendence," or rather a "racism without races."

As Etienne Balibar cogently points out, in our contemporary world where people do not seem to believe in racial essentialism any longer, "racism without races" functions as a renewed form of racism, which Balibar then calls "neo-racism." According to the critic, the dominant theme of neo-racism is "not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences" (21). In truth, when Liu looks for a racial identity of his immigrant parents, he mainly focuses on the process of identification through which his parents have achieved an acquisition of the "white" bourgeois mainstream culture. They did their wedding ceremony in American style, not having traditional Chinese rituals; they had earned their degrees in prestigious American universities; they settled in the suburban bourgeois neighborhood in Poughkeepsie, NY; they used to make occasional trips to Chinatown in Manhattan as white middle-class Americans would do. If Chineseness is merely a set of "cultural" attributes, it is possible for the immigrant couple to throw out their ascriptive racial identity simply by furnish their life with "white" bourgeois styles. In this regard, I agree with David L. Li's point in "On Ascriptive and Acquisitional Americanness: *The Accidental Asian* and the Illogic of Assimilation" that Liu's text "exemplifies the inherent democratic contradiction of a United States caught between the normative disciplines of ascriptive and acquisitional Americanness and the illogic of assimilation" (108). *The Accidental Asian* not only exposes the unevenness of supposedly universal American democratic ideals but also stabilizes the stratification in it. Second, for the sake of his evaluation of his parents'

Americanness, Liu in effect conjures up, or reinforces, the stereotypical Chineseness with which he can compare his not-so-quite-Chinese parents. After all, the narrative of assimilation keeps the binary of whiteness and Chineseness that creates societal hierarchy intact, far from deconstructing it. In this context, I cannot agree more with Balibar's criticism that a cultural notion of race runs a risk of neo-racism. At first glance, the anti-racist urge might seem to erase biological essentialism. However, this differential, malleable notion of race still deploys culture as a second-nature in that it is always predicated on a set of socio-economical stereotypes of an ethnic identity—speaking broken English, behaving secretive in the presence of white folks—to name a couple examples of cultural Chineseness from Liu's text. Although neo-racism renders a notion of race as transmittable, culture here—instead of biology—now functions like a nature. As Balibar puts it, “[culture] can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin” (22).

Fundamental to the structure of Liu's narrative of assimilation is the logic that whiteness and Chineseness—as cultural (or, neo-racial) identities—cannot coexist, although “mixing” is possible biologically through intermarriage. Liu's parents as “atypical” Chinese immigrants who “traded Chinese formality for the more laissez-faire stance of this country” exemplify the binary opposition (36). In particular, his narrative of assimilation, incisively based on mutual exclusion of “American” and a certain “Chinese,” assumes an uneven power relation between “white” and “Chinese” identities. As a result, Liu's *Bildungsroman* projects whiteness as an endpoint of the social ladder, an outcome of his parents' assimilation process, and an indicator of the *Bildungsroman*

protagonist's maturity. Thus the narrative of gaining is always accompanied by the narrative of losing; while imagining his parents' process of seeking upward mobility, a "hopeful phase—this period of composing a life to the rhythms of a new country," Liu finds "the familiar idiom of progress—the steady sense of climbing, and climbing higher, of forgetting, and forgetting more" (13; 14). This incompatibility of whiteness and Chineseness shapes the discourse of assimilation into "an act of creation as much as destruction" throughout Liu's *Bildungsroman* (56). Liu makes clear that when he aspires to assimilate, it was not "white" as a phenotype, but "whiteness" as power and influence: "I do not want to be white. I only want to be integrated. When I identify with white people who wield economic and political power, it is not for their whiteness but for their power. When I imagine myself among white people who influence the currents of our culture, it is not for their whiteness but for their influence" (55). In order to assimilate, that is to say, in order to attain "whiteness" as the societal merit, the Lius had to choose either Americanness or Chineseness since these two cultural identities cannot go hand in hand. For instance, his father's proficiency in English must pay the price: Liu's "forfeiture of Chinese" that will, in turn, preclude his linguistic communication with his grandmother (20).

However, the loss is considered worthwhile inasmuch as the loss is exchanged by the acquisition of cultural capital: Chao-hua's "perfect" English that helps him discard Chineseness. Needless to say, Chao-hua's partial forgetting of Chineseness will, in turn, accelerate Liu's acquisition of English vis-à-vis Americanness.

The time has also come, I think, to conceive of assimilation as more than a series of losses—and to recognize that what is lost is not necessarily sacred. I have, as I say, allowed my Chinese ethnicity to become *diluted* . . . I may have been born a Chinese baby, but it would have taken unremitting reinforcement, by my parents

and by myself, for me to have remained Chinese. Instead, we left things alone.
And a torrent of change washed over me. (55 Emphasis mine)

Here the author emphasizes the gradual, arduous process of dilution of Chineseness that took the whole two generations of the Lius. Indeed, as the author points out, the process of “[his] own assimilation began long before [he] was born.” Rather, “[i]t began with [his] parents, who came here with an appetite for Western ways” (36). Insofar as assimilation is considered dilution of his ancestral ethnicity, Chineseness becomes unable to coexist with whiteness. This compulsive metaphor of either/or also haunts Liu’s recollection of his father’s disease as well. When the family was informed the diagnosis, Liu recollects, the doctors speculated that “the medication [Chao-hua]’d taken in China as a child had damaged his kidneys, but they couldn’t be sure” (26). This passage interestingly insinuates the limit of agency in the process of assimilation. The ill body of the first-generation immigrant, deteriorated by his pre-immigration life in his country of origin, creates a resonance with his only “half-finished acculturation,” as Liu puts it (37). In other words, Chineseness comes to be fatal to the completion of assimilation and, thus, has to be *diluted*. Otherwise, the coexistence of the incompatible binary (Chineseness vs. Americanness) would lead to a tragic conclusion. All in all, this logic of dilution is fundamental to the structure of *The Accidental Asian* whose narrative creates a double entendre—of mourning the death of the “half-acculturated” Chinese immigrant (Chao-hua Liu) and, at the same time, of celebrating the birth of the “white” Asian American subject (Eric Liu).

The discourse of assimilation foregrounded in the incompatibility of Chineseness and Americanness functions as what Edward W. Said refers to as “Orientalism.” In his legendary book, *Orientalism*, Said interrogates the Western habitual system of thought,

arguing that Orientalism is premised on the ontological and epistemological distinction between “the Occident” and “the Orient.” Similarly, the autobiographical self in *The Accidental Asian* confirms the polarity of Chineseness and Americanness and renders them irreconcilable both culturally and geographically. Through the chapter, “The Chinatown Idea,” Liu recollects the life of his grandmother and his encounter with “Chinatown Chinese.” The logic of chronological dilution also applies here. Born in Chengdu, in Sichuan Province, Min-yu Tu lived even less assimilated life than her daughter, Liu’s mother. She did not speak English; She lived in Chinatown for the rest of her life. Being re-created by her grandson who does not speak the only language she uses, Min-yu Tu’s life is, in essence, represented as an unassimilated otherness: “She rarely left Chinatown. She must have realized then that America was to give her not a second life but only a full circling of the life she already had. East, West, East: ever in motion, *ever in exile*. What I never asked my grandmother was where her restless heart was home” (95 Emphasis mine). While including the story about Po-Po is more or less necessary for the autobiographical self who not only reflects upon his origin but also constructs his autonomous individuality as opposed to his grandmother’s, Po-Po is merely on the periphery of the narrative consciousness. To be sure, when Po-Po was alive, the communication between Po-Po and Liu was rarely achieved due to his incapability of speaking Chinese. Liu recollects:

I generally didn’t have much to say in response to Po-po’s commentary, save the occasional Chinese-inflected *Oh?* And *Wah!* I took in the lilt of her Sichuan accent and relied on context to figure out what she was saying. In fact, it wasn’t till I brought my girlfriend to meet Po-po that I realized just how vague my comprehension was. *What did she say?* Carroll would ask. *Um, something about, something, I think, about the president of Taiwan.* Of course, I’m not sure Po-Po even cared whether I understood. (90)

As opposed to the representation of Baba, Po-Po evidently does not get to have a fair—let alone valorized—image mainly because Liu did not understand her. Being considered unassimilated and incomprehensible even by her own family, Po-Po is represented as someone “like a child,” talking in a “Yoda-like voice” (90; 88). In contrast to her grandson who has successfully assimilated and thus attained Americanness, Po-Po, unquestionably Chinese, is rather represented as a juvenile, immature creature who fails to achieve the ethnic progression of the *assimilative Bildungsroman*.

To Liu, Po-po is an epitome of Chinatown as “a pool of undiluted Chineseness” (102). Overlapping his memories of visiting Po-Po’s place in Chinatown with his family’s trip to the Amish country, Liu finds a similarity between these two places: “living exhibits of prelapsarian purity; monuments to our pilgrim’s progress; sad, ceremonial totems of an assimilation beyond repair” (87). The function of Liu’s detailed descriptions of Chinatown, “Chinatown Chinese,” and Po-po is twofold. First, by including his Chinese grandmother’s story in his autobiography, Liu creates a contrast between Chinatown Chinese and himself who has become “white inside.” Here Chinatown Chinese including the author’s grandmother is represented as “the Other,” in Said’s sense, that helps Liu define his liberal subject/citizen. Moreover, Liu’s perspective towards Chinatown is shockingly Orientalist (102). To the second-generation Chinese-American, his grandmother’s place is “basically grimy” and “lumpy,” and the people in Chinatown seem “not only inscrutable but indifferent” (88; 96). Hence, the certain image of “undiluted” (thus, culturally *more* Chinese) Chinese people, including Po-Po, allows him to justify his relatively American identity by virtue of his contrasting personality, behaviors, and experiences.

Second, the geographical and epistemological distance between Chinatown and the Liu family's home in Poughkeepsie reinforces the incompatibility of Chineseness and Americanness. When he visits Po-Po's place, Liu, unable to communicate with his grandmother, merely plays the role of a foreign visitor. After being served hearty meals, the time always comes for Liu to leave the place to which he does not belong. By the same token, when Liu's family has a trip to Chinatown as tourists, they feel as if "outsiders," surrounded by Chinatown Chinese, including the grandmother of the family. The scene where the Liu's family runs into Po-Po while "touring" in Chinatown highlights the geographical and epistemological distance between the two separate worlds existing in the nation-state: "[T]he realization that [Po-Po's] daily routine was our tourist's jaunt, that there was more than just a hundred miles between us, consumed the backs of our minds like a flame to paper. We lingered for a minute, standing still as the human current flowed past, and then we went our separate ways" (103). Consequently, Liu vividly remembers "the comforting sensation of being home" as they come back to Poughkeepsie, to "[their] own safe enclave" after encountering (104). In light of Said's paradigm, these two overriding geographical entities in Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman*—Chinatown and Poughkeepsie—support and reflect each other while presented as thoroughly unmingled (Said 5).

By projecting the generational process of assimilation vis-à-vis dilution of Chineseness, "The Chinatown Idea" (the story of Po-po "ever in exile") and "Song for My Father" (Baba's "half-finished acculturation") set the expectation for the upcoming generation, Eric, who is about to successively complete the family's long journey for assimilation. It is "Notes of a Native Speaker" where young Liu directly describes his

own process of assimilation; there he reflects upon his childhood, adolescence, and then college years through which he had fully attained whiteness. Especially, according to the author it was by the time he approached adolescence when he started noticing the social power of race relations. Liu writes: “I could no longer subsume the public world under my private concept of self . . . For the first time, I had found something that did not come effortless to me” (39). Here our protagonist initially becomes aware of not only the freedom but also limit of agency in the process of assimilation, which contains the contradictory processes of both acquisition of what is inherited and identification with what is chosen. To be precise, there are “three adjoining arenas” creating specific conflicts in young Liu’s process of assimilation: his “looks,” “loves,” and “manners” (39). These three elements—each of which suggestively indicates biological race, spouse, and cultural race—are all fatally involved with Liu’s self-fashioning of a “white” identity. As young Liu, being surrounded by “white” classmates, notices his differences—either bodily or cultural—he actively starts striving to overcome the differences mainly by attaining what constitutes whiteness. Liu recollects the turning point:

And so in three adjoining arenas—my looks, my loves, my manners—I suffered a bruising adolescent education . . . [I]n each of these realms, I came to feel I was not normal. And obtusely, I ascribed the difficulties of that age not to my age but to my color . . . I responded not by exploding in rebellion but by dedicating myself, quietly and sometimes angrily, to learning the order as best I could. I was never ashamed of being Chinese; in fact, rather proud to be linked to a great civilization. But I was mad that my difference should matter now. And if it had to matter, I did not want it to defeat me. (40)

One of the elements adolescent Liu strives to transform was, first of all, his looks—specifically his hair. Our young protagonist’s concerns for this specific arena, is particularly intriguing provided that he proclaims it is whiteness as an influential social

status—not as a phenotype—he strived to attain. This demonstrates “neo-racism,” supposedly predicated on cultural differences, is still tremendously influenced by phenotypic, bodily differences. In the era of neo-racism, the significance of race as phenotypic differences is often consciously ignored as people reject biological essentialism; however, as Linda Alcoff in *Visible Identities* rightfully insists, race—along with gender—is one’s physical manifestation, and it operates through a “visible marker” on the body. Accordingly, race as a physical marker still functions as an active indicator of identity, and in turn generates a certain set of expectations. To prove the point, Liu confesses his looks as a Chinese boy definitely had a negative impact on his courtship in the school whose demographics was mainly “white” (42). In this light, adolescent Liu, as he unwittingly admits, tried to transcend his race—biological as well as cultural—which affects his agency in choosing his love, spouse, and fortune.

As he strives to overcome racial differences, something obvious comes across: although it might be possible for one to perform a cultural race, one can hardly perform a biological race. To clarify, one cannot choose one’s biological race even if one could choose to adapt to the culture of a different race. In particular, Liu demonstrates the improbability of transcending biological race through the story of his hair. As an example of the ascriptive forcibly given to Liu, hair “betrayed” Liu’s yearning to wear a “well-styled hair.” And to the youngster it means a hairstyle of the white race. As he recalls, “1980 was a vintage year for hair that was parted straight down the middle, then feathered on each side, feathered so immaculately that the ends would meet in the back like the closed wings of angels.” As opposed to his dreaming of “wearing the fluffy, tailored locks of the blessed,” Liu’s hair in reality was “cursed” (41). His hair, as “the

words “Chinese hair” should suffice as explanation,” shows the opposite characteristics to the image he pictures as his own:

My hair was straight, rigid, and wiry. Not only did it fail to feather back; it would not even bend. Worse still, it grew the wrong way. That is, it all emanated from a single swirl near the rear edge of my scalp. Parting my hair in any direction except back to front, the way certain balding men stage their final retreat, was a physical impossibility. It should go without saying that this was a disaster. (40-41)

After experimenting with a various hairstyles, Liu comes to notice nothing could change the characteristics of his “Chinese hair.” Being “straight, rigid, and wiry,” Liu’s hair simply would not do—not even mimic—a white hairdo. If the Chinese hair does not go with a white hairdo, a solution would be granted by exterminating either of the incompatible. The “salvation” finally comes after long years of agony and a series of experiments, as Liu removes his Chinese hair by getting his head shaved. “I did it—to the tearful laughter of my friends, and soon afterward, the tearful horror of my mother,” Liu writes, “I had managed, without losing face, to rid myself of my greatest social burden. What’s more, in the eyes of some classmates, I was now a bold (if bald) iconoclast. I’ve worn a crew cut ever since” (42). The dramatic shift from the forced reality of the “physical impossibility” to the self-fashioning of his bodily image “without losing face” is a remarkable narrative strategy, which gives the protagonist an autonomous conviction. His identity as a “banana” (an Asian white inside), which indicates both physical impossibility and cultural possibility to transcend one’s race, is thus rendered self-acclaimed rather than forced.

As adolescent Liu acknowledges the forced power of racial labels (Chinese or white), he soon noticed the other side of the racial labels. That is, what society considers “racial” labels are not only socially constructed but also performable, or rather they are

performable *precisely because* they are social constructs. While he could not become white outside, he could definitely become “white inside” by performing the cultural race of whites. Liu describes how much he was perplexed when he was surrounded by American-style “[c]eremony, protocol, etiquette . . . (which) made [him] feel like an awkward stranger,” not knowing how he should behave. One example was about table manners; he did not know which silverware to use, in which order, and often forgot to put his napkin on his lap. As he goes on to say, “Things that came as second nature to many white kids were utterly exotic to [him]” (44). His immigrant family, once described as “heartbreakingly American” by himself, now suddenly appears to be an antithesis to the normative American family of his “white” friends:

I sat there, swallowing huge servings of gravy-drenched food with this other family. These were the moments when I realized I was becoming something other than my parents. I wanted so badly then just to be home, in my own kitchen, taking in the aroma of stir-fry on the wok and the chattering sounds of Chinglish. And yet, like an amphibian that has just breached the shore, I could not stop inhaling this wondrous new atmosphere. My moist, blinking eyes opened wide, observing and recollecting the customs and predilections of these “regular” Americans. The more time I spent in their midst, the more I learned to be like them. To make their everyday idioms and idiosyncrasies familiar. *To possess them.* (45 Emphasis mine)

The social immigrant’s “imagin[ing] [him]self beyond race” is incisively predicated on the strategy of mimicry. To Liu, to self-invent is nothing but to pick up “the customs and predilections of the “regular” Americans.” While growing up alongside many “white” people in Poughkeepsie and attending Ivy League Universities such as Yale and Harvard full of accomplished “white” people, Liu has been exposed to the circumstantial merits and has exerted his capabilities to “inhale” and “possess” “the culture of the influential class” (52).

Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman* challenges the old binary of "Asian" and "American" by re-conceptualizing the social category of white(ness). As the author provides his case as an example of "banana," Liu demonstrates that race is not the only component that has influenced the nation-state's constructing, reinforcing, and revising the category of white(ness). As Liu emphasizes, this desire to mimic "white" bourgeois culture is not just about race but also about class: "To say simply that I became a banana, that I became white-identified, is somehow simplistic. As an impressionable teen, I came to identify not with white people in general but with that subset of people, most of them white, who were educated, affluent: *going places* (46). While utilizing the particular Asian American subject's class privilege, Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman* thus revises Lowe's paradigm of the contradictory interplay between possessive "American *citizen*" and disregarded "Asian *immigrant*," a critique by and large grounded in racial difference. While reading Ng's *Bone*, I examined how Leila's stepfather, Leon, represents the dispossessed "Asian *immigrant*," that has been defined over against the normative "American *citizen*" not only legally, but also economically and culturally (Lowe 4). Contrary to Leon, Liu's assimilative narrative, deeply grounded in Liu's capacity to consume and possess "white" bourgeois culture, contributes to the evolution of American whiteness whose yardstick becomes increasingly not solely dependent on skin color. As Mike Hill cogently examines with the category of "white trash," what constitutes whiteness is not simply racial attributes but a complex mixture of one's identity including class. Take this anecdote from Liu's text, for instance:

There were one or two occasions in seventh grade when the toughs in the back of the bus taunted me, called me *chink*, shot spitballs at me. I didn't like it. But each time, one of my friends—one of my white friends, whose house I'd later eat dinner—would stand with me and fire back both spitballs and insults. Our insults

were mean, too: scornful references to the trailer parks where these kids lived or the grubby clothes they wore or the crummy jobs their parents had. These skirmishes weren't just about race; they were also about mobility. (46)

This anecdote—which happened when adolescent Liu was navigating the fissure in racial identities—sheds light on the crucial role of class, the most neglected of American identities, in the formation of Liu's social identity. As an antithesis to whiteness, the “tough,” “trailer park” kids in the back of the bus represent “white trash” in the author's particular community, whose existence is excluded from the category of whiteness. As the quote demonstrates, Liu's practice of aligning himself with “white” kids with “mobility” happens simultaneously with the practice of distancing himself from “white trash” kids. This ongoing practice of identifying, and disidentifying, a certain group of others based on class and culture—if not the essentialist notion of race—occurs, too, when the protagonist chooses his spouse, Carroll.

Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman* ends with the story of the author's racial intermarriage to a Jewish woman, and the narrative of intermarriage signals the protagonist's completion of *Bildung*: the Asian American subject's full assimilation into whiteness at the expense of the dilution of ancestral Chineseness. Theorists of ethnicity have believed intermarriage is an important index of assimilation. As sociologists put in various ways, intermarriage signifies “one of the most telling indicators of the degree of assimilation of one ethnic group into another,” “one of the last rungs on the ladder to final integration and assimilation,” and “the surest means of assimilation and the most infallible index of its occurrence” (Qtd in Spickard 10). Indeed, the story of Liu's interracial marriage serves as an ultimate form of assimilation in his *Bildungsroman*, whereby a non-white racial subject obliterates his Chinese identity by completing

assimilation. Suffice it to say, it only advances Liu's assimilation process in that it boosts the dilution of Chineseness both racially and culturally. More importantly, the model of assimilation Liu uses, above all, derives from Jews and Jewishness, according to the author: Liu writes, "the very metaphor of "the Jew" now stands for assimilation" (146). The second last section of his book, "New Jews"—which is suggestively located right before "Blood Vows"—particularly explores how Jewishness, an epitome of assimilation, has come to represent whiteness in the U.S. Liu points out, "the Jews (once constituting one of the American minority groups) became white" (162). In Liu's re-conceptualization of whiteness, Jewishness thus becomes a defining element of the idealized, national identity: "The Jews assimilated, we know: became American. But America assimilated too: became Jewish" (171). A representative of "the culture of the influential class," Jews may or may not be racially white. The social—if not racial—category of Jewishness, however, enables the author to resolve the contradiction between his respective race (Chineseness) and his adoptive social identity (whiteness): "Some of my best friends are Jewish. Really. Why that is, I'm not sure. But it's fitting, I think, considering how often I myself am called a Jew," writes Liu (145).

Reflecting upon his marriage to the Jewish Woman, Liu consciously deploys the choice narrative again. Liu writes, "I *chose*. I chose to enter into a relationship with Carroll. Not with 'a white woman,' not with some nameless paragon of 'white beauty,' but with Carroll Haymon" (183 Emphasis original). Resonating with Liu's statement that "What maketh a race is not God but man," this choice narrative is grounded in liberal individualism through which the author highly values autonomous sovereignty of individuals; by utilizing the choice narrative, Liu in effect creates "the sovereign self" in

his own autobiographical, *assimilative Bildungsroman*. In particular, the protagonist's choice of racial intermarriage is significant in the context of anti-miscegenation laws. Historically, anti-miscegenation laws in pair with immigration laws served a contested site where the U.S. denied the Asian-American inclusion into the nation-state. By marrying interracially, Liu affirms his American democratic selfhood while evincing a new age when an ascriptive, biological sense of race is increasingly losing its meaning. Liu affirms: "Race is falling apart. Collapsing into complexity. As a magnificent Stanley Cruoch essay puts it, 'Race Is Over' (190).

Despite the author's self-conscious assertion of his personal agency and individualistic freedom, what motivates Liu's choosing Carroll in the final stage of his assimilation process is rather ambiguous. Liu's emphasis on his individualistic choice in marriage in particular, is evidently in continuation of his overly optimistic declaration of the demise of race at large. Inasmuch as Liu is puzzled to understand the natures of "personal" choices (on his personal preference for "white" women, he questioned: "What does this all mean? What should it mean? How much of this pattern is chance? How much, the product of unseen forces?"), his conscious forgetting of race sounds naïve given that a race concept in our current society still exists in a different way, while being intersected with other agents such as class and ethnicity (182). It cannot be denied that intermarriage rates have been growing over the course of the twentieth century; however, as Paul R. Spickard's study in *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* shows, there is evidently "the existence of preference hierarchies for mate choices" in the age of miscegenation premised on anti-racism (371). What Liu is precluded to see is the fact that this particular way of assimilation—Liu's

gradual move towards whiteness by diluting his Chineseness—does not guarantee the eradication of socio-economical hierarchies along color lines; rather, I further argue, Liu’s assimilation process merely reproduces the hierarchies *within* racial identities. For Liu summons the neo-racial stratification between whiteness and “poor white,” or whiteness and a certain set of “Chineseness” (which he categorizes as “Chinatown Chinese”) as the author uses “cultural difference” in “locking individuals and groups . . . into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin” (Balibar 22). Despite Liu’s declaration of the death of race, his model of assimilation re-generates the binary between whiteness and non-whiteness, based on the cultures and predilections of “white” bourgeois Americans. This binary constitutes “a hierarchy of groups with whom one is more or less willing to associate oneself,” so much so the hierarchy influences Liu’s *personal* choices, including his preferences of WASPy lifestyle, “white” women, and “Jewish” friends (Spickard 372). Moreover, Liu’s assumption that the race of Asian American is nothing but a “cocoon, something useful, something to outgrow” is narrowly grounded in the case of an interracial couple—the fact that his and Carroll’s children will be a “synthesis” of two different races (83). As a result, in the interracial couple’s envision, Chineseness becomes an element of *consent* rather than *descent*; Chinese language, for instance, would become what their half-Chinese, half-Jewish children will voluntarily acquire for their own benefit, not forcibly given.

“I have assimilated. I am of the mainstream,” proclaims Liu (35). Eric Liu’s *The Accidental Asian* is a meaningful work in the context of U.S. legislative history of Asian exclusion that had denied the racial group—in fact, a highly diverse and heterogeneous range of people—the basic rights to live a free life, own properties, marry interracially,

and build a normative nuclear family. While depicting a self-possessive individuation of an Asian American “social immigrant,” Liu’s *assimilative Bildungsroman* provides a contrary *Bildung* narrative to those of *Bone*’s two protagonists who were unable to seek the classical European self-possessive ideals. Liu’s text demonstrates how much the societal construction of race has changed over the course of the second half of the twentieth century to some privileged Asian Americans, after the U.S. repealed a series of Asian exclusion acts based on the essentialist notion of race. While showcasing an Asian American becoming “the mainstream,” Liu’s text confirms the presence of an ideal multicultural, anti-racist American society to a selected few. Projecting a progressive narrative of the Liu family’s gradual assimilation into “white” American mainstream society, Liu’s text thus highlights Asian American heterogeneity and points to a transformation of Asian-American subjectivity. Through the text, the narrator has succeeded in self-fashioning his social identity as “white”—if powerful and influential—while attesting that what he inherits as the biological givens are merely “accidental.” Nonetheless, fundamental in Liu’s *assimilative Bildungsroman* is the dynamics of gaining and losing, remembering and forgetting, as well as a process of identification and that of disidentification, which in turn generates “neo-racism.” In particular, the narrator in *The Accidental Asian* renders ascriptive Chineseness and acquisitional Americanness as incompatible—although interchangeable—so much so he has to formulate the logic of dilution in order to achieve his liberal democratic selfhood. The disappearance of a racial signifier in the text, however, does not necessarily guarantee a total nullification of racism as well as an equal protection of democratic ideals for all, for culture substitutes race, reinforcing hierarchies between *and* within race(s).

CHAPTER IV

NEITHER EXCLUSIVELY “ASIAN” NOR “AMERICAN”:
DECONSTRUCTIVE NARRATIVES OF LEPROSY AND HAWAIIANNESS
IN LOIS-ANN YAMANAKA’S *BLU’S HANGING*

Now get
your ass
in your room
and fold
all the laundry.
Then iron
your father’s shirts.
Go. The laundry
is on your bed.
Hurry up.

—“Parts,” *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*

Mama told me, “Always take care of your brother and sister.”
Now I lay me down, down.
—*Blu’s Hanging*

In *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* (1993) composed of four poetic novellas, Lois-Ann Yamanaka presents multiple voices of Japanese Hawaiian teenage girls who are bombarded by parents’ “advice” ironically blended with verbal abuse. Being vulnerably exposed to such authority, the girls—still growing up and curious about what they can do, what they cannot, and, after all, *why*—come to forcedly acknowledge gender roles and sexual threats existing in the local Hawaiian working-class community. The girls’ pidgin stories of growing up represent their arduous battle not to sacrifice their selfhood. In particular, two poems in the verse novellas, “Kala Gave Me Anykine Advice Especially About Filipinos When I Moved to Pahala” and “Parts,” bear witness to the girls’ internalization of patriarchal norms loudly spoken by a parental figure who gives

orders for household chores as well as “Anykine Advice” about proper femininity. In the two poems, narrators’ mouths become a means to merely repeat abusive verbal comments given by the authoritative figures. There is no voice of the narrators at all; the pure repetition of the verbal abuse without the victims’ additional comments demonstrates the helpless state of the girls struggling with low self-esteem and a lack of agency: “What did I say/about going into/a man’s room? . . . Now you a *ho-a*./You not a virgin./Nobody/going love you./Nobody/going marry you. . . Dirty girl./Dirty/girl” (“Parts” 73; Emphasis original). As such, *Saturday Night*, Yamanaka’s first publication and her only work written in the form of poetic novellas, mainly focuses on exposing the generational conflicts the girls struggle to manage, without offering an evident reconciliation. *Saturday Night* thus fails to provide a developmental narrative of the girls’ coming-of-age stories mainly due to the limits of the genre used.

Published four years after *Saturday Night*, *Blu’s Hanging* (1997) re-captures the presence of the oppressive haunting voice inside the head of another Japanese Hawaiian teenage girl, Ivah Ogata. *Blu’s Hanging* navigates the transition from childhood innocence to maturity, as it tells the story of the Ogata children—Ivah, Blu, and Maisie—on the island of Moloka’i, Hawai’i, struggling to get over the loss of their mother. With the absence of the mother, the poverty-stricken family urges Ivah, the oldest child, to take on the role of surrogate mother. Throughout the text, Ivah strives to grow up as an independent individual by making a painstaking decision to leave her ailing family in order to attend a college-prep high school in Honolulu. The conflict in Yamanaka’s coming-of-age story is mainly caused by the clash between the protagonist’s willingness to be upwardly mobile and her motherless family’s expectation for her to take care of

them. In describing the internal and psychological growth of her protagonist, Yamanaka artistically combines the structure of the *Bildungsroman* and poetic language. Through the character of Ivah, who has similar concerns to those of the narrators in *Saturday Night*, *Blu's Hanging* fully explores the ways in which the underprivileged Japanese Hawaiian subject comes to reach a resolution by reconciling her conflicting desires for communal survival and for individualistic freedom. More importantly, the coming-of-age novel, in contrast to Yamanaka's earlier work, provides a historicized critique of the root cause of the seemingly generational conflicts.

Through *Blu's Hanging*, Yamanaka interrogates the ways in which the nation-state has played an active role as a societal power of constraint to the Japanese Hawaiian narrative of subject formation. In particular, Yamanaka reinscribes the particularity of her Hawaiian protagonist by interrogating Hawai'i's experiences and histories of leprosy settlement.⁶ By utilizing the Hawaiian history of leprosy settlement, Yamanaka sheds light on the historical contradiction between "Asian" and "American," a binary that has been construed as mutually exclusive by the nation-state and that has incessantly created various American stereotypes of Asian otherness. In Ng's *Bone*, the Asian subject as an antithesis of the American normative citizen is promulgated as a perpetual immigrant, unassimilated and dispossessed; in Liu's *The Accidental Asian*, the Asian otherness takes the shape of an "Asian geek," "overachiever," the model minority. In Yamanaka's Japanese Hawaiian *Bildungsroman*, leprosy above all is novelized as a fatal agent of

⁶ "Leprosy" has been officially replaced by "Hansen's disease" in the U.S., and especially there has been a tendency to avoid the term "leper" mainly due to the socially constructed stigma associated with the disease. However, this Chapter will use "leprosy" and "leper" to follow Yamanaka and to interrogate the ongoing shame affecting the leprosy victims and their descendants.

descent, generating another stereotype of Asian otherness: a “filthy” Asian leper. So much so, like the previous Asian American *Bildungsroman* protagonists, Yamanaka’s protagonist strives to challenge the national discourse of leprosy which had a direct impact on her parents’ subject formation.

Given some similarities between Ng’s and Yamanaka’s *Bildungsromane* due to the protagonists’ gender and class, by reading Yamanaka’s texts I intend to highlight the diversity in the seemingly unified term, the Asian American *Bildungsroman*. The Asian American *Bildungsroman* produced in Hawai’i truly complicates the literary tradition due to the postcolonial dimension. Provided that the Native people and territories of Hawai’i have been overrun by non-Natives—first by white colonialists and, then, Asian immigrants—scholars of Hawaiian studies and Native activists such as Haunani-Kay Trask and Candace Fujikane insist that there should be an understanding of the distinction between Natives and “settlers” including Asians migrating to the Hawaiian territories. Trask’s article, “Settlers of Color and “Immigrant” Hegemony” particularly sheds light on the analogy between white colonialists and Asian immigrants by investigating how both parties are driven by the American national ideologies, such as statehood, citizenship, and the American dream of success. In contrast to both white and Asian “immigrants” vis-à-vis “settlers,” Trask and Fujikane assert, the interests of Native Hawaiians are engaged not in identity politics premised on the American nation, but rather in a kind of Hawaiian sovereignty movement (Trask 2005, 1-7; Fujikane 2000, 73-83). Moreover, it is also important to acknowledge Asian intra-group tensions, another legacy of the U.S. restructuring of Hawai’i’s economy and demographics through the expansion of sugar plantations and, eventually, resort hotels. Individual Asian American

ethnic groups, after migrating to Hawai'i, being contracted as plantations workers, have been racialized differently depending on each group's historical, economic, and political circumstances. In particular, a large number of the Japanese has moved into seats of power as they tended to emphasize an ethnic solidarity and a class strategy of unionization,⁷ while the Filipinos have been subjected to racial discrimination. Needless to say, Native Hawaiians as a people have also remained the most subordinated group, being characterized by both white and dominant Asian—mostly Japanese—settlers as unsuited to assimilation.

Given the complicated history of colonialism and “systematic local Japanese racism,” Yamanaka's text has received a tremendous amount of criticism since its publication mainly due to its characterization of Uncle Paulo as a sexual predator (Fujikane 2000, 161). Surely, *Blu's Hanging* bears witness to not only the troubled relationship between Natives and Asian “settlers” but also structural inequalities amongst Asian ethnic groups developed on the territories. It cannot be denied that there is an erasure of the Native Hawaiian presence in Yamanaka's text. Moreover, the novel through some privileged characters of Japanese teachers (such as Miss Ito and Miss Nishimoto) and the ascendancy of another Japanese character—the protagonist, Ivah—seems to demonstrate the dominance of the Japanese and the reinforcement of the Asian

⁷ See Ronald T. Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii 1835-1920*, 153-76 and *Strangers From A Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Tom Coffman, *The Island Edge of America: A Political History of Hawai'i*. The Japanese ascendancy into the middle class had been partly resulted by the fact that they were the largest of Hawai'i's many ethnic groups. In 1920 Asians totaled 62 percent of the island population, compared to only 3.5 percent of the Californian population and only 0.17 percent of the continental population. And the Japanese alone represented 43 percent of the island's Asian population (Takaki 1989, 132, 180). Overall, Japanese immigrants came to make up 40 percent of Hawai'i's population (Coffman 18).

intra-group stratification. Yamanaka's *Bildungsroman* grounded in the particular history of leprosy settlement, however, also challenges the assumption that Natives and Asian "settlers," fighting for material and political equalities against the U.S. nation-state, cannot create a coalition. In contrast to the rigid adversarial model (Natives vs. Asian "settlers"), Yamanaka portrays how racism, constitutive of the U.S. nation-state, has had an impact on not only Natives but also some Japanese, a racial group that has been unquestionably characterized as the most dominant Asian ethnic group in the context of Hawaiian history. Here the discourse of leprosy provides a productive lens for a coalitional model for Native Hawaiians and some Asian Hawaiians to collectively engage in civil rights movements.⁸ Yamanaka's text underlines Fujikane's assertion that Native Hawaiians and Asian "settlers" can fight together "not out of a desire for belonging to the nation but out of a recognition that discriminatory legislation affects both Natives and settlers in the colonial system, albeit in different ways" (2000, 82).

While interrogating the ways in which the U.S. national controlling of leprosy has subjugated lower-class Asian Hawaiians, Yamanaka points to the contradiction of the idea of citizenship, which at once enables and restricts subjecthood. In order to interrogate how the nation-state has played an active role as a societal power of constraint to her Japanese character, Yamanaka strategically juxtaposes the contemporary, second-generation Ivah's subject formation and the first-generation parents' coming-of-age

⁸ According to "*The Path of the Destroyer*": *A History of Leprosy in the Hawaiian Islands and Thirty Years Research Into the Means By Which It Has Been Spread* written by a longtime resident of the islands and former physician to the leper colony, A. A. St. M. Mouritz, "the first American census, A. D. 1900" table shows most of the patients sent to the leper colony, Kalaupapa, were native Hawaiians. The census table shows the native Hawaiians, only 24% of the whole population around that time, produced more than 90 percents of the islands' leper population (Mouritz 21).

stories. By utilizing the triangular model that consists of the regulatory nation-state, the poverty-stricken parents as leprosy victims, and the protagonist in her particular *Bildungsroman*, Yamanaka highlights the interconnection between the *familial* and the *national* constraints. This dual-narrative structure, revising the conventional *Bildungsroman*'s form, not only allows the author to present two different kinds of "society" (family and nation-state) and their distinctive roles within the narrative of Ivah's subject formation, but also allows the author to elaborate on how the nation-state, as larger society, determines the material and psychological condition of the Asian Hawaiian family. As the youth re-assembles the first generation's fragmented memories in the leper colony, Kalaupapa, *Blu's Hanging* demonstrates that the familial constraints presented as major narrative conflict for Ivah (the absence of mother, poverty, and domestic violence) have been triggered and reinforced by the national conflict with Asian Hawaiian leprosy bodies. As an abundance of historical and literary sources have documented, in the context of the particular U.S. history with Hawai'i, leprosy bodies of native Hawaiian and Asian descent found in the islands over a century roughly from 1850 to 1950 had served as an antithesis of the national imagining of ideal citizenry. *Blu's Hanging* is set in Kaunakakai, the town only a few miles away from the former leper colony located on the other side of the Moloka'i island. Although *Blu's Hanging*, opening with Ivah's narration after her mother's funeral, by and large depicts the family's grieving process through which they overcome the loss of the mother, Eleanor Ogata, it is imperative to read the text within the historical, national, and imperial context. The novel, as it goes on, gradually unfolds the history of the supposed family "secret" which led to Eleanor's death. Drenched with pervasive images of disease, shame, threats, and death,

the narrative puts forth Ivah's personal exploration of, and escape from, the family secret and its oppressive legacy.

In this chapter, I aim to examine how the text interrogates the interconnection between the protagonist's twofold society: the U.S. nation-state and the protagonist's poverty-stricken, motherless family. In reading the dual-narrative structure of *Blu's Hanging*, I consider the family's history with leprosy (the *national* constraint) and the feeling of love (the *familial* constraint) as two main causes of the conflicts Ivah encounters over the course of her coming-of-age. In order to clarify the interconnection between the two constraints, I first examine how the text manifests the major narrative constraint is as of national, instead of solely familial while historicizing Eleanor's death. Regarded as a shameful story by the Ogatas, leprosy—the truth of Eleanor's death, which in turn interrupts Ivah's liberal individuation—is hidden from the protagonist until her father's exposure of the history to her, as well as from the readers for the first half of the novel. By unfolding the family's history with leprosy controlled by the U.S national project for controlling the disease, *Blu's Hanging* highlights the nation-state's institutionalizing a leprous body as an active element that hinders the competence of the Asian family—let alone an Asian leprous individual's ability to build a nuclear family.

The nation-state's institutionalizing a leprous body is by and large achieved through the national denial of Asian Hawaiian lepers' right to normative family, as the novel describes. And the national discrimination against lepers is premised on the constructed image of lepers as dangerously infectious, immoral, and thus shameful, which is a stark contrast to the images of the normative, ideal citizen the nation-state assumes, on the one hand, and of the possessive individual the classical *Bildungsroman*

valorizes, on the other. The national paradigm considers leprous bodies unqualified for the normative family (thus unqualified for the ideal nation), so much so they have to be segregated from the rest of non-leprous family members and re-located in the leper colony. Not only are lepers prevented from being legitimate members of normative family, but they are also prevented from creating their own nuclear family in the colony, as *Blu's Hanging* portrays. If an ideal citizen imagines oneself to be a free individual having rights to possessive properties (including his/her own body), the institutionalization of leprosy above all strips the rights off the patient and thus makes him dispossessed of his own body, family, land, and even potentials. In this historicized context, the first-generation couple's *Bildung* (development) is precisely represented as their regaining of the right to normative family; only after Bertram and Eleanor are declared negative could they be "paroled" and allow to reproduce offspring, including Ivah.

Inasmuch as the novel's main focus is Ivah's fight with the aftermath of the U.S. institutionalization of Asian leprous bodies, the narrative in effect sheds light on the *infectious* natures of leprosy—symbolically rather than medically. For it is described as "substance" that cannot but be passed on to the next generation through the familial connection. To put differently, the novel investigates the legacy of the U.S. institutionalization of leprosy upon the bodies of the contemporary generation, despite the breakdown of the series of myths about leprosy (leprosy as a hereditary or infectious disease), which has happened during the second half of the twentieth century in the wake of new medical discoveries and the advent of the sulfone drug. Suffice it to say that the family's poverty—let alone the death of Eleanor due to the over-consumption of the

sulfone drug, which only exacerbates the family's economic problem—is the legacy of the U.S. institutionalization of leprosy. Being exposed to the past generation's history with leprosy, Ivah is presented as being in danger of becoming an inheritor of her parents' dispossession. Although the legacy of leprosy does not have medical effects on her body, it surely affects Ivah materially and psychologically inasmuch as the legacy has a direct impact on the fate of the youth. Given the aforementioned discussions, I aim to examine how Ivah particularizes the conventional *Bildungsroman*'s logic of “as well as” as the coming-of-age narrative foregrounds the Japanese Hawaiian history of leprosy settlement, which could be understood as neither exclusively “Asian” nor “American.”

The second half of this chapter examines how the feeling of *love* and the sense of *responsibility*, caused and reinforced by the family's history with leprosy, function as the direct constraints to Ivah's subject formation. I examine how the family without the mother in turn becomes an active yet snaring site of the protagonist's self-formation. In *Blu's Hanging*, love—more specifically, familial love—is above all shored up as an oppressive institution whose dire conditions have been over-determined by the nation-state's promulgating racialized binaries. In examining the role of family in Ivah's coming-of-age, I aim to particularly interrogate the ways in which the first-generation parents come to take a vicarious role to oppress the Asian Hawaiian youth. Furthermore, I examine how Yamanaka demonstrates Ivah's achievement of modern socialization throughout her deconstructive *Bildungsroman* where the hybrid protagonist faces an onerous task not only to internalize, but also reconcile, the societal norms of her bilateral world: her Japanese Hawaiian “leprous” family and the essentially white, American nation-state.

Yamanaka's use of leprosy as a crucial element to the teenage protagonist's fate underscores the rise of the genre's two primary parties—the citizen and the nation-state as the particular individual and society—and their influences upon an underprivileged Japanese Hawaiian subjecthood in particular and an Asian American coming-of-age at large. When Moretti remarks that the classical *Bildungsroman* renders seemingly incompatible “individuation” and “socialization” two complementary, convergent trajectories, the critic highlights the social role of the genre. A literary device designed to produce “a convinced citizen” who internalizes demands of the nation-state, the *Bildungsroman* is above all grounded in the logic of “as well as” that satisfies both social demands and personal choices. In other words, the genre projects a “satisfied equilibrium” between an individual and society as it portrays “the comfort or ease of being in the world” (36). Slaughter in “Human Rights, the *Bildungsroman*, and the Novelization of Citizenship” thus emphasizes the allied and analogous relation between the genre and the nation-state: the classical *Bildungsroman* “incorporate[s] the problematic individual into the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and thereby legitimating the democratic institutions of the emergent rights-based nation-state” (94). If the classical *Bildungsroman* truly posits “the nation-state as the highest form of expression of human sociality” and “the citizens as the highest form of expression of human personality,” as Slaughter asserts, Yamanaka's redeployment of the genre using the history of the Kalaupapa leprosy settlement challenges the universalizing assumptions about the genre's two primary parties. By exposing the U. S. institutionalization of

leprosy at the climax of her deconstructive *Bildungsroman*, Yamanaka uses the genre to exhibit the ambivalent natures of the nation-state, which not only “incorporates” but also excludes “problematic individuals” in order for the building of an ideal nation.

Narrated at the climax of the novel, the Ogata history with leprosy historicizes the cause of Eleanor’s death and of the family’s poverty, and its ongoing impact upon the later generation. Bertram recollects how Eleanor and he were shipped to, and segregated in, the leper colony:

When the Japs bomb Pearl Harbor, the government came scared that all us leprosy patients was going break out of the Kalihi Receiving Station. So fast kine, one day in May, they wen’ put all us kids on one boat going strait to Kalaupapa. And we was all scared. I thinking: This is it. It’s all pau. I going there for die. Was mostly all kids on that ship and the sad part was, Eleanor’s madda neva said goodbye to her [. . .] Us heard years and years later that Eleanor’s madda had penny mo’ kids and was shame that had one kid with leprosy in the family. Thass how was—you no like nobody know had one *pilau leper* in your family. Best you keep um one big secret. (143)

By using the historical anecdote, Yamanaka implicitly criticizes the ways in which the U.S. nation-state had employed the Asian leprous youth located in Hawai’i in constructing the images of the ideal citizen and ideal nation-state. As Bertram’s language illuminates, leprous bodies, serving its role similar to the old Asian stereotype of “yellow peril”—or, more specifically, “Japs bomb(ing) Pearl Harbor,”—are mainly regarded as a foreign threat to the national body. In the writing of the nation-state’s coming-of-age as a neo-imperial, self-possessive entity, the Asian ill bodies are excluded and thus required to be confined and suppressed. Accordingly, social mobility as a prerequisite for an ideal modern socialization is not allowed to the leprous bodies; instead, they are given extreme immobility as a form of segregation. The first-generation couple’s story of confinement underscores the ways in which the U. S. nation-state has racially differentiated its ideal

citizenry particularly in Hawai'i, annexed and consequently granted statehood over the course of the twentieth century. While reading Ng's *Bone* in Chapter 2, I examined the ways in which the U. S. had prevented Asians from achieving an ideal modern socialization precisely through racialized and gendered immigrant exclusion acts. Similarly, Bertram's "secret" demonstrates how the U.S. had regulated the particular disease in order to fortify the image of its ideal citizenry, precisely by excluding diseased, thus "problematic" Asian bodies located in the colony. The fact that both methods are designed to hinder people of Asian descent from forming a hetero-normative nuclear family is intriguing. Considered an ideal unit of the nation-state, hetero-normative families (who would reproduce more citizens) are to consist of ideal citizens, not leprous bodies in the national paradigm.

Many critics of the disability studies demonstrate that leprosy has been deployed by the nation-state in its construction of an ideal nationhood and citizenry (Anderson, Gussow, Moran). In the national imagining of an ideal nation, the leprous body is used as an antithesis of an ideal citizen inasmuch as the former is considered immoral, promiscuous, contagious, and therefore ought to be segregated and either cured or sterilized, as seen in the U.S. history of leprosy settlement on Kalaupapa. Given that the conventional *Bildungsroman* is a literary genre designed to (re)produce an ideal citizen (self-possessive, healthy, and convinced), the leprous body serves its purpose as an epitome of the failure—as well as antithesis—of civility. Worth noting is the U.S. had the leprosy settlement on Moloka'i in 1898 when the U.S. annexed the Hawaiian Islands; only after the advent of the sulfone drugs which made lepers no longer contagious was the islands granted statehood as the 50th state of the U.S. In other words, the nation-

state's controlling and curing leprosy coincides with the nation-state's including the leper colony as part of its territory.

There is a series of cultural myths and stereotypes created for thousands of years that helped the modern nation-state construct the duality of a leper and a citizen. First of all, believed to have spread to Hawai'i from China,⁹ leprosy was considered an external disease or "a foreign threat encroaching on the national body," as Mitchell T. Moran notes in *Colonizing Leprosy: Imperialism and the Politics of Public Health in the United States* (3). On top of the racialized stereotype of leprosy, there is also a strong undertone of the Anglo-American Christian civilizing mission as leprosy was viewed as a disease of immorality. As Warwick Anderson's article, "Leprosy and Citizenship" notes, "Europeans have represented lepers as unclean, tainted, and dangerous; contact with leprosy often has been equated with moral and physical contamination." Of course, the discourse of morality merges with the racialization of leprosy. Anderson goes on to say, "leprosy was rediscovered during this period of imperial world and associated with the customs and habits of 'inferior races'" (708). The discursive connection between leprosy and morality is telling since it gives the ill body a distressing sense of "shame," with which one voluntarily ostracizes oneself from public sphere by internalizing the authority's logics. Bertram's case clearly shows how the regulatory nation-state's logic is internalized by the individual.

⁹ Historically there was an assumption of the Chinese connection with the disease of leprosy. Mouritz explains the origin of the disease in *The Path of the Destroyer*: "There is no word in the Hawaiian vocabulary for leprosy. Instead 'Mai Pake,' or Chinese sickness, is generally in use to define leprosy." Mouritz goes on to remark, "The name 'Mai Pake' does not necessarily presuppose that the Chinese introduced leprosy into Hawaii, it simply assumes the Chinese connection with the word. Abundant and conclusive evidence, however, exists that the Chinese coolie has carried leprosy into other countries" (27).

What I would like to highlight in reading the legacy of leprosy in *Blu's Hanging* is the fact that the history of European imperialism has shaped leprosy as either a *hereditary* or *infectious* property, which further ostracizes the patient and his/her descendants from the national and the local communities. *Blu's Hanging* points to leprosy's transmittable aspect—both psychological and economic—mainly through familial relations (by nature or by blood), as it delves into the question of how the first-generation's history of leprosy has a tremendous impact on Ivah's potentials as a child who is about to have coming-of-age. By using the trope of leprosy as a metaphor for the evolution of race relations in the U.S., Yamanaka challenges the universalizing claims of the *Bildungsroman* and the nation-state, two mirroring worlds where subjects (protagonists/citizens) are supposedly free from constraints of birth.

The historical transition of the categorization of leprosy from “hereditary” to “infectious” is analogous to the transition of the race relations from “biological racism” to “new racism,” despite the fact that the former transition happened chronologically prior to the latter. Until the Spanish imperial era medical authorities had considered the disease hereditary; in the wake of U.S. imperial expansion, this earlier institutionalization of leprosy was replaced with “a new theory portraying it as a communicable disease caused by the spread of a specific bacterium” (Anderson 711; Moran 5). Either way, descendants of leprosy patients become the ones put in the most vulnerable position to contract the disease. For even in terms of the later theory (leprosy as an infection caused by a bacterium), leprosy was deemed spread through contact with a leprosy body, so much so it must be the child(ren) who has repeated, close contact with their leprosy parent(s), if any, who would be most likely the infected. In this light, I contend the

transition in the discourse of leprosy (from hereditary to infectious) is interconnected with the transition in the discourse of American racism (from biological to cultural or “new” racism).¹⁰ In the wake of the dissolution of explicit empires and the old racism heavily relying on supposed science—especially eugenics—the discourse of leprosy as well as of racism confronted a new phase. Instead of the old paradigm whose dominant denominator was biological heredity (such as blood or genes), the U.S promulgated the insurmountability of cultural differences in justifying its racist assumptions. The report of the missionary board working on Kalaupapa employed racial/cultural assumptions in explaining the cause of the disease: it is “largely because of the habits and customs of the Hawaiians . . . [Hawaiians’] characteristics and customs render them more liable to contagion or inoculation” (Moran 142). Although the theory of biological racism (the hereditary model) seems to be replaced by cultural racism (the infectious model), culture here functions almost the same as biology due to the unchanged premise of its deep-rootedness.

Needless to say both “hereditary” and “infectious” models justified not only the governmental requirement of isolating lepers in order to protect the health of normative citizens, but also the sterilization of patients and the restrictions on the patients’ parental rights if the government failed to prevent them from having children (Moran 146-52).

Moran notes: “Public health regulations . . . required pregnant women (contracting

¹⁰ My use of the phrase, “the new racism,” comes from Etienne Balibar’s study in his article, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?”. Theorizing “a neo-racism” that has appeared in the era of decolonization, Balibar asserts biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing race elements and relations inasmuch as “culture can also function like a nature . . . as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin.” Therefore, a new racism is “a mere tactical adaptation” of the old racism (22, 17).

leprosy) to give birth within the settlement hospital and instructed the medical staff to remove children from their parents immediately and transfer them to the nursery” (148). As this historical record proves, the U.S. nation-state had promulgated the image of lepers as inherently incapable parents, and systematically denied the rights of citizens to racialized lepers. Provided that Eleanor’s history with leprosy and her following death have aggravated the familial constraints Ivah encounters in her course of *Bildung*, the role of U.S. nation-state in the reproduction of class relations now becomes evident. A daughter of the previous leprosy victims, Ivah’s coming-of-age is fated to excavate the repressed history of her parents, which still has its material impact on her body.

Ivah’s re-writing her parents’ leprosy history is meaningful in two major ways. While it revises the generic structure of Ivah’s *Bildung* narrative, it undeniably functions to record the first-generation couple’s coming-of-age stories, having been repressed by the U.S. national project. Interestingly, the parents’ repressed histories have been continuously self-regulated by themselves, the leprosy victims, as they label the national histories solely as a family “secret.” Bertram considers the disease entailing his confinement merely as a *personal* issue and thus feels ashamed, so much so he barely tells his children about leprosy as a *national* memory. As a result, Ivah strives to come to terms with the incomprehensible part of her world. Although Ivah stays ignorant of the family history with leprosy until its exposure, she knows the scars on her parents’ bodies are something they are ashamed of: “Mama touched the scars on her hands and face. Weird scars. Like Poppy’s—on his hands and face. . . hands that Mama and Poppy hid in their pockets. And faces turned down, shamed eyes” (51). Ivah’s narration later on unfolds Eleanor’s memories in the leper colony, as she opens Eleanor’s treasures box in

the old drawer. The box contains the pictures of Eleanor and Bertram being quarantined in Kalaupapa. One of the pictures shows 5-year-old Eleanor “naked with her hands across her chest, looking with a girls’ sad eyes into the camera, and the numbers of a criminal in front of her,” when she just arrived at the facility, in 1945. Another picture shows grown-up Eleanor “smiling with the red lips, and Poppy” finally discharged in 1958, at the age of 25 (184). As Ivah’s re-writing of her parents’ leprosy history demonstrates, Eleanor and Bertram had spent the most of their childhood and youth in the leper colony, being denied to plot their life stories due to their racialized illness. Despite the authorities’ intervention, Eleanor and Bertram always dreamt to have babies, so that they invented their own way to imitate a normative family when staying in Kalaupapa. Bertram explains the project to Ivah:

“Down Kalaupapa, the stones, they was me and Eleanor’s babies. We had plenty babies with elegant kine names and grandchildren and great-grandchildren all in pie pan and muffin pans and bread pans in the house . . . we started one family all over again. Starting with Ivah Harriet, blue rock, hard and strong. Presley Vernon, porous like the a’a. And Maisie Tsuneko, little cinder. But the childbearing rocks, they remind your Mama and me of the days when you guys was one far-off dream for two people with leprosy in one house full of stones.” (183)

In the context of the neo-imperial project of rendering leprosy bodies dispossessed of their inalienable right to education, housing, and reproduction, Eleanor and Bertram’s painstaking achievement of making their own nuclear family by giving birth to healthy, non-leprosy children comes to signify a subversive challenge against the authorities. Bertram tells Ivah, “we wanted for prove to the world, everybody, that we could make perfect children, perfect” (144).

By rendering the *legacy* of leprosy—if not leprosy as the disease per se—capable of being passed on to Ivah, however, Yamanaka critically points to the

consequence of the U.S. institutionalization of leprosy upon the leprosy victim's children. Leprosy's institutionalized image as hereditary or highly contagious is scattered around the text from the onset of Ivah's narrative, showing the biological as well as cultural insurmountability of the family's leprosy history. The images of scars, sores, and deformations—all related to the symptoms and aftermath of leprosy—are recurrent throughout the novel, creating the sense of foreboding. The Ogata children's cat, Hoppy Creetat, has "pawed deformed"; Ivah suffers from trench mouth, which reminds Bertram of leprosy: "I'm on my back with my feet propped up on the hassock with Hand, Hoof, and Mouth disease again. Poppy's mad because it's highly contagious, the red dots surrounded by white-fat halos" (21). In addition, the community people—such as Mrs. Ikeda—use the label to characterize the Ogata children: "You goddamn filthy kids got leprosy *in your veins*" (191 *Emphasis mine*). Mrs. Ikeda's comments show how leprosy in the contemporary Hawaiian society is still considered as the disease of "substance" (by blood or nature), which hinders the later generation's abilities as free, healthy, competent individuals. All of these persistent symptoms and stigmas prove that the legacy of leprosy as an institution of thought is much harder to eradicate than the disease itself.

While utilizing leprosy as the trope of descent relations in the modern-day Japanese Hawaiian *Bildungsroman*, *Blu's Hanging* not only foregrounds, but also challenges, the historical binary of "Asian" and "American." First of all, in the eyes of the community people, Ivah is neither a leper nor a normative, healthy citizen. The generic structure of *Blu's Hanging*, contextualizing the particular binary of leper and citizen, further complicates the umbrella binary of "Asian" and "American" that has been promulgated based on the premise of the mutual exclusion of "Asian" and "American."

As David Palumbo-Liu's study explains with his concept of "the Asian/American split," "Asians in the U.S. as a whole have been considered "inadequate" to the inherently white nation, so much so "the constitution of "Asian Americans" seems never able to be completed" (Palumbo-Liu 213-16). Even in the 20th century onward when the U.S. accepts Asians legally, socially, and psychically, America's ideological contradiction has continued the system of thought that "Asian" and "American" are incompatible. The binary of leper and citizen generating not only racist but also classist differences at once exhibits the continuation of the national splitting of "Asian" from "American," and deconstructs the Asian/American binary with the particularity of the history of Kalaupapa leprosy settlement. For instance, the Ogas's experiences of leprosy could be contained within neither exclusively white "American" nor "Asian" narrative given the fact that the majority of the leprosy victims were Native Hawaiians. As the inheritor of the hybrid histories, Ivah comes to assert a distinctive identity politics as compared to both Anglo-Americans and other privileged Asians in seeking her coming-of-age.

What is telling about the discursive association between the binaries of the leper/citizen and the Asian/American is that Yamanaka's *Bildungsroman* juxtaposes the binaries as a structural condition of Ivah's coming-of-age. In turn, the generic conflict our protagonist has with her society appears to be twofold, for the particular natures of the world she lives in. The protagonist of *Blu's Hanging* is a female descendant of Japanese immigrants to the territory of Hawai'i, the space that has been re-structured by the history of Euro-American colonial projects since the eighteenth century. Hence, the teenage daughter of the poverty-stricken family on the island of Moloka'i, on the one hand, is an American citizen whose basic rights are equally protected by the Constitution. This

national ideology urges her to seek the national ideals, such as individualistic freedom, autonomy, and independence. On the other hand, she is at once a daughter of the leprosy victims and poverty-stricken Asian family that is more or less still governed by patriarchal logics. This family microcosm beseeches her for communal survival, which requires Ivah's physical labor at the expense of the national ideals. In order for the particular *Bildungsroman* protagonist living in such a bilateral world, to achieve a "modern socialization," Ivah truly must accomplish an "actualization and stabilization of Asian American" (Palumbo-Liu). In the light of the aforementioned discussions, the generic conflict of *Blu's Hanging* is not only familial in nature but also national. The text's structural dilemma (the clash between two seemingly incompatible societies and subjects) is symptomatic of the contradiction of the U.S. liberal democratic society. By re-deploying the genre of the *Bildungsroman* having the daughter of the leprosy victims, Yamanaka entitles her readers to clearly observe the disparity between the liberty (de jure inclusion of universal subjects) and limitation (de facto exclusion of a particular racial group), as opposed to the ostensible assumptions of the genre and the nation-state.

Both the *Bildungsroman* and the nation-state assume a "possessive individual" living in the ideal image of unilateral "society" where everyone is equally given social mobility with which one can become anything. *Blu's Hanging's* protagonist as an American subject is aware of the right, and Ivah's desire for better education is indicative of her internalization of the ideals. In contrast to the universalizing assumptions of the classical *Bildungsroman* and the nation-state, Yamanaka's *deconstructive Bildungsroman*, however, demonstrates that the diversity of race and ethnicity exists with a clear stratification on the islands of Hawai'i. Ivah says, "Most of the Japanese and

Pakes don't get tokens. Most of the Portuguese, Hawaiians, and Filipinos do" (104). Ivah's comments that a certain ethnic groups are low-income families first reflect the history of Hawai'i as a class society in which the Japanese has occupied higher socio-political positions than any other Asians and Native Hawaiians, and Filipinos as a group of the lower class have been subjected to racial discrimination and racial profiling. By exposing the hierarchies amongst various ethnic groups, *Blu's Hanging* evinces the disjunctions in the umbrella term, "Asian American." At the same time, the novel based on structural inequalities in Hawai'i also disrupts the rigid stratification by having her Japanese Hawaiian protagonist coming from the poverty-stricken family. Ivah goes on to say, "I'm the only Japanese who gets a free lunch token" (104). While employing Ivah, being alienated from the dominant middle-class Japanese Hawaiian, as a protagonist, *Blu's Hanging* subverts at once the classical *Bildungsroman's* assumption of a normative individual that has primarily centered on Western bourgeois male subjects, and the Hawaiian cultural stereotype of the "local" Japanese as politically dominant and materially opulent.¹¹

¹¹ It is worth examining the origin and evolution of the term "local." "Local" generally refers to Asians born and raised in Hawai'i, particularly as opposed to "haole" (meaning "foreigners") such as white missionaries, military, plantation owners, and tourists. The term initially came out of Asian plantations workers' shared experience of oppression. Especially, "local" came to represent a working-class consciousness and solidarity in the wake of sugar strikes originating in 1909. As most Japanese and other dominant Asians have gained economic and political power, the working-class origins of "local" have been replaced by a dominant ideology of "settlers." Due to the growing local Asian wealth and privilege, Asian Hawaiians' use of the term has been criticized particularly by Native Hawaiian scholars and activists. For instance, Trask offers a helpful criticism in "Settlers of Color and "Immigrant" Hegemony." She criticizes Asian Hawaiian's re-appropriation of the term, "local," while making a distinction between indigenous people of Hawai'i and those Asian Hawaiians who call themselves "local," with "the substitution of the term "local" for "immigrant," which is, itself, a particularly celebrated American gloss for "settler" (2).

The impoverishment Ivah's family suffers is one of the direct indicators that illuminates leprosy as a metaphor for the legacy of U.S. imperial race relations. Since Eleanor passed away, Ivah as the eldest child having two younger siblings and a dysfunctional father is expected to take on the role of surrogate mother for the remaining family. Above all, Ivah's love for her mother and for her family, especially her younger siblings, functions as an active catalyst for the obligation. Although she is still a child, Ivah is forced to grow up prematurely mainly due to the absence of the mother. In turn, Ivah's sexual curiosity and sexual terror are mediated through her younger siblings. Blu becomes so desperate for someone to love him after their mother passed away that he eats incessantly for the lack of the maternal love. The youngest child, Maisie stopped talking as a result of the loss. Blu and Maisie are thus presented as more vulnerable than Ivah; a potential victim of the sexual threats—that is posed by the men on the streets such as Mr. Iwasaki and Uncle Paulo—is Blu or Maisie rather than Ivah herself. In particular, Blu's obsessions with food, the sense of belonging, and bodily explorations—caused by the premature death of Eleanor—put him in danger of being targeted as a sexual prey.

“Blu! BLU!” And I run to the side of the house, where I see Blu with his hands full of Violet Crumbles, a \$100,000 bar, and a box of Milk Duds. Dollar bills. His pants are below his briefs which are stretched down on hip.

“BLU!” He doesn't even turn to see me. Instead, he backs away with his hands full of chocolate bars and money. Mr. Iwasaki, an old man's stiff penis in his own chocolaty hand, makes slapping sounds, slurping sound: gray-dry penis skin with a red-tip head, plenty of loose skin, and melted chocolate. . .

I have no words for Blu, no words, but I feel it all behind my eyes, burning. A stream of urine comes down my legs as I drag him quickly across the sidewalk. (20)

Presented with a startlingly realist narrative, this scene captures the urgency of Ivah's coming-of-age as opposed to Blu's childhood innocence. In the scene, Blu still ignorant of sexual shame took candies and money for pleasing Mr. Iwasaki, and it creates the

sense of shame in Ivah. Here Ivah is presented as the only one amongst the Ogata children who could read the sexual economy. Although the molestation was not done to herself, Ivah is the one who feels ashamed, and this is represented by the “urine” whose “sticky” presence is lingering “on [her] rubber slippers” (20). By inserting the molestation scene at the outset of the Ivah’s coming-of-age story, Yamanaka strategically highlights the urgency of the younger Ogata children’s need for a maternal figure. While presenting Ivah’s subjectivity as intimately intertwined with that of her younger siblings, Yamanaka in effect exposes the myth of the individual subjecthood, which the classical *Bildungsroman* is grounded in. Suffice it to say this incident makes Ivah, who clearly observes her younger siblings’ vulnerable innocence, actively internalize her duty to perform the role of a surrogate mother. The obligation to preserve and protect the family later on clashes with her opportunity to go to Honolulu for education, inasmuch as the former and the latter are presented as mutually exclusive; if Ivah leaves, Blu and Maisie—two 8-year-old and 5-year-old children—will have no one to take care of them.

Despite the daunting exhortation, Ivah is however still very young, and the signs of her childhood are scattered around the text. Though willing to perform the role of the mother for her remaining family, Ivah is very much perplexed in that she does not know *how* to perform the role: “Mama, you died and didn’t leave me a damn clue. Teach me how to be a mama too” (37). This confusion only aggravates the conflict between her desire “to be a mama” in order to fill the void, and her other desire to be herself. Being thirteen, the identity of Ivah is still in formation. Typical to adolescent girls, she is no less obsessed with beauty than any other girls in the community. Interestingly, the stratification of race and ethnicity becomes crucial elements to Ivah’s identity formation.

Ivah imagines her racial/ethnic identity in relation to the white, to other “local” Hawaiian Asian groups, and even to Japanese mainlanders. And her imagining of her racial/ethnic identity is extremely ambivalent in the sense that she simultaneously assimilates and dissimilates into the set of otherness. For instance, the narrator’s conception of normative female beauty is predicated on the physiognomy of white women. Without hesitation, Ivah spontaneously identifies herself with a white female character in the *Archie* comics, Betty, who is an epitome of a white bourgeois female beauty. The scene in which Ivah is acting out the roles with Blu demonstrates, not only is she ignorant of the American comics’ valorization of white female sexuality, but she is also blind to the effect of another kind of cultural colonialism: American comics that is written in the standard English:

I’m always Betty. Betty who loves Archie (Mitchell Oliveria) but can never have him. “Oh darn! Darn! Darn! Archiekins, why can’t you break your date with Veronica? If you want me to fix ole Betsy so she runs for the Valentine’s Day Sock Hop, then you stay here with me. Pass me the wrench, Archiekins.”
... I’m always Betty. Blond, good, kind, sweet, and who Archie really should love and smooch but doesn’t. (54)

Ivah’s identification with Betty as well as her duplicating Betty’s lines written in standard English is suggestive, in strong contrast to how young Ivah generally shows her strong antagonism towards the “haole” culture throughout the text. Ivah’s desire to replicate a white female beauty is in contradiction to the narrator’s self-acclaimed Hawaiianness; throughout the text Ivah consistently and aggressively claims her Hawaiianness in comparison with others: 1) the “haolified” Japanese such as Miss Nishimoto (the Americanized Japanese who is from the U.S. mainland and speaks only standard English), 2) the upper- and middle-class “local” Asians (those “Japanese and Pakes [who]

don't get tokens") as well as 3) the white "haoles" such as Miss Owens (who shares neither language nor race with Ivah).

Her antagonism towards the "haole" culture (which is, the white American mainstream culture) is demonstrated through the fact the most of the dialogues, re-written in retrospect by grown-up adult Ivah, uses the pidgin English. In particular, young Ivah's conscious resistance to the remnant of colonialism is often demonstrated through her interaction with teachers from the mainland U.S. (such as Miss Nishimoto from Ohio and Miss Owen from Texas) who valorize the haole culture and force their Hawaiian students to accommodate to it. When Miss Owen has conference with Ivah concerning Maisie's "uncommunicab[ility]," the school teacher tries to impose the hierarchy between the pidgin English and the standard English upon her by saying, "I find the pidgin English you children speak to be so limited in its ability to express fully what we need to cover today" (59-60). Nonetheless, Ivah strategically subverts the hierarchy by pointing out to readers Miss Owen's use of Hawaiian language is rather inadequate: "If you close your ears, you won't hear [Miss Owen's] mispronounce Kamehameha and Kaunakakai wrong every time she uses it in a sentence" (63). In addition, on a deeper level, the encounter with haole teachers inspires Ivah to (re)claim her Hawaianness and to (re)value her community, inasmuch as the haole teachers manifest the incompatibility of the concerns for the local community and the acquisition of the mainland culture. The presence of Miss Owen, in particular, demonstrates the paradigm of "the Asian/American split"; the more Asians assimilate to the white American mainstream culture, the less they could preserve their concerns for ethnic cultures. In reaction to the conference with Miss Owen

depreciating the siblings' Hawaianness, Ivah—who has been questioning her role as a family nurturer—comes to self-assuredly assert, “I *can* be a Mama too” (63).

Having such a conflicting identity politics, the Japanese Hawaiian coming-of-age narrative becomes Janus-faced. Ivah's neighborhood peers, the narrators in *Saturday Night*, show the same pattern of identity politics. For instance, one girl's conception of an ideal personhood is predicated on the white physiognomy. In “Tita: Japs,” the young narrator exposes her desire to get the eyelid surgery to look like a white women: “I tell you, my next birthday, when my madda ask me what I like, I going tell her I like go Honolulu for get one double eye operation. I no care if all bruise” (33). Surrounded by the supposed superiority of whiteness, the narrator in wanting to be part of the ideal beauty struggles to deny her identity as a “Jap” since it implies an antithesis to the ideal. The logic of the mutual exclusion is applied here, too; in order to be the ideal (double eyelid of the white American), one needs to exterminate the non-ideal (single eyelid of “Japs”). An ethnic slur designed to differentiate those Americans of Japanese descent from the body of “normative” Americans, the term “Japs” was commonly used during and after WWII in the American media. The anti-Japanese hatred in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor produced a number of articles that utilized facial stereotypes, with which they then encouraged citizens to sort out and reported “Japs” to the authorities. The assumption is in connection with the American ideological contradiction that denies the coexistence of “American” and “Asian” or of “citizen” and “leper.” Worth pointing out is, despite the fact that the U.S. was at war with Germany and Italy as well as Japan, Japanese Americans were the only ethnic group amongst the three, whose loyalty to the U.S. was suspected. In particular, the loyalty questionnaire shows the incompatibility of

“American” and “Japanese” in that the questions included assume the Americans of Japanese descent would be deemed loyal *either* to Imperial Japan *or* to the U.S. Suffice it to say the authorities did not allow the coexistence of the two, the possibility of being loyal to *both*. As one of the many examples including “yellow peril” and “model minority” that have promulgated and reinforced the incompatibility of “American” and “Asian,” the term “Japs” was nationally constructed as mutually exclusive to the nation-state’s imagining of its idealized citizenry. In this light, having “Japanese” eyes come to have several layers of negative connotations to the later generation (a sign of being a “Jap,” which is an antithesis of normative beauty, loyalty, and normative citizen).

The national construction and reinforcement of the incompatibility of “Asian” and “American” render *Blu’s Hanging’s* narrative split into two, and thus generate a unique Japanese Hawaiian double-consciousness. To be sure, Ivah’s double-consciousness is caused by being caught between her conforming desire to merely reproduce normative patriarchal ideologies and her dissident desire to resist such norms and create her own selfhood. To put differently, this unique double-consciousness is generated by the protagonist’s desire to embrace contrasting ideologies of both the ethnic family (communal subject formation that requires the sacrifice of self and freedom) and the nation-state (individualistic subject formation). Since Ivah lives in such a twofold society, both of these desires—although mutually exclusive—are real to her. As a result, Ivah’s narrations show two contrasting images of self. On the one hand, she is willing to perform the maternal role by taking care of her younger siblings. Her compliant self insists: “I can be a Mama too” (64). On the other, she feels a growing desire to challenge the patriarchal system that has suppressed female subjectivity. As the novel progresses,

we see the other side of Ivah's consciousness come out, asserting the opposite desire: "Don't wanna be a Mama too" (157). In Morettian classical *Bildungsroman*, one must achieve a "compromise" in order to make a successful transition from "a fearful subject" to "a convinced citizen," and one could make such an accomplishment precisely through internalizing the societal norms as one's own. Particularly, in case of our hybrid protagonist, she is compelled to confront two conflicting "societal norms" due to her national, racial/ethnic, gendered, and more importantly class identity: 1) one that is projected by her impoverished motherless family and that invites her to help preserve her microcosm, and 2) the other that is suggested by a democratic rhetoric of American individualism and that allows her to be self-determined to leave her family. Instead of replicating the binaries (i.e. *either* choosing to take over the role of the traditional—sacrificial and selfless—maternal figure *or* seeking an individualistic self development by leaving her remaining family), Ivah's coming-of-age narrative subverts the binaries, and, consequently, asserts a unique Hawaianness that encompasses "Asian" as well as "American."

Ivah's narrative reaches a resolution as the protagonist painstakingly comes to acknowledge that leaving her family to attend the Mid-Pac in Honolulu, in the long run, will help not only Ivah as one individual but also the whole family gain social mobility; Ivah writes, "Going (to the Mid-Pac will) be betta for the three of us" (254). At the end of the novel, Ivah's attainment of maturity is demonstrated through her gaining of the ability to see the interconnection between the family's socio-economic status and the role of education. And the protagonist's maturity now creates a stark contrast to her father's

onerous inability to decipher the U.S. historical contradiction, which has been hindering the Ogata family's coming-of-age. Bertram says:

“And now, I get one boy who all fucked up. Fuck, I get one boy who going be homo ‘cause of me. Then I think no, ‘cause of Ivah. Was all Ivah’s fault. Then I think no, this all Eleanor’s fault for coming topside and making these babies and then taking those fucking sulfone drugs. Then I think no, Eleanor would blame me. Was my fault. Where I was? How come I no could protect our boy? What the fuck’s wrong with me?” (257)

Blu's Hanging's “compromise” asserts its own unique adaptation of the *Bildungsroman's* structural logic of “as well as.” Moretti remarks, in the world of the *Bildungsroman* we do not find “the tragic logic of the ‘either/or,’ but rather the more compromising one of the ‘as well as’.” And as the critic further points out, “it [is] *precisely this predisposition to compromise* that allowed the *Bildungsroman* to emerge victorious” (10 Emphasis original). Indeed, the genre serves as a subversive tool for the hybrid subject to help decipher, and then reconcile, the contradiction in her multilateral—Asian, Hawaiian, and American—world that has been veiled from the historical view. As opposed to the national narrative dictating the binaries of Asian/leper and American/citizen, Ivah proclaims that the contradiction can be truly reconciled, and the coexistence of “Asian Hawaiian American” must be possible without one’s relinquishing the other(s). Compared to Eric Liu’s *assimilative Bildungsroman* whose “compromise” takes place only at the expense of “dilut[ing]” his Chineseness, Yamanaka’s re-deployment of the “as well as” narrative and her deconstruction of the “Asian/American split” with Ivah’s claiming of her Hawaiianess is truly meaningful to the self-fashioning of Asian Hawaiian subjectivity.

The fluidity, hybridity, and complexity of Ivah’s coming-of-age narrative are first exemplified by her flexible ability to deploy language in re-writing her story. I would like

to emphasize while the narrative of *Saturday Night* uses only the pidgin English throughout the text, the narrator of *Blu's Hanging* is fluent in both pidgin and standard English. To be sure, the narrative of *Blu's Hanging* can be divided into two sections by the language used: 1) the one that consists of verbalized monologues of, or dialogues between, characters, written in pidgin and 2) the other that mostly consists of Ivah's internal narration written in standard English. This leads us to an assumption that Ivah, now being an educated adult, selectively and strategically uses both language in recollecting her past. This at once demonstrates Ivah's ability to speak freely both languages and her shrewd strategy in choosing between the two, which is allowed to neither "local" working-class Hawaiians nor mainlanders. Ivah's deployment of both languages is also symptomatic of her ability to excavate and decipher the forgotten history of her parents' leprosy as a national memory; living in the hybrid world, Ivah becomes a better observer of U.S. liberal democratic society. In this light, I further argue that the hybrid subject's split selfhood—a state caused by being caught in limbo between the Native culture (which is considered inferior) and the dominant culture of the colonizer—leads to the subject's subversive privilege, rather than her pathological incapability. Ivah's selective use of pidgin, intermixed with standard English, demonstrates her unique "as well as" identity that is neither wholly Asian, American, nor Hawaiian.

Ivah's narrative presents her growing up as neither rigidly rejecting the white liberal democratic rhetoric nor assimilating into it at the very expense of her concerns for her indigenous community; instead, her case exemplifies the acquisition of *both*. Given the Asian American history of exclusion grounded in "the Asian/American split," I argue

Yamanaka's creation of the unique Asian American *Bildungsroman* grounded in the logic of "as well as" exemplifies the eventuality of attaining *both*, and thus signifies a challenge to the national assumption of the incompatibility of "Asian" and "American." As opposed to our protagonist, Ivah's father Bertram and her "haole" schoolteachers are presented as two poles of the incompatibility, whose existences merely replicate the false presumption of the mutual exclusion of "American" and "Asian," or "American" and "Hawaiian." To clarify, Bertram shows the sweeping overgeneralization, "haoles are haoles," as he experienced the U.S. racialization of Asian leprous bodies. In reaction to the national denial, Bertram has come to deny accommodating to any institution of the white culture. An outcast from the white mainstream culture, Bertram has in effect forged himself into a totally dispossessed person who cannot even take care of his own family, including himself. Meanwhile, the "haole" school teachers' rigidity is also criticized by Ivah. For instance, "Mrs. Susie Nishimoto, originally from Bloomingdale, Ohio, who teaches Hawaiian Studies and PE at the high school" shows the lack of empathy, humanity, as well as respect for the Hawaiian culture despite her position at school (37). Both Mrs. Nishimoto and Miss Owen imitate the nation-state's role as a repressive apparatus that at once valorizes an ideal citizen and relinquishes particularity amongst non-ideal citizens.

By using the narrative of grief as the central pretext in Ivah's coming-of-age story, Yamanaka in effect shores up the family's grieving for the illogic of the U.S. liberal democracy. The structural condition of Ivah's coming-of-age, created and

exacerbated by the national project of segregating lepers, truly renders Ivah's growing-up more challenging inasmuch as seeking an individualistic selfhood in her circumstance is presented as something "selfish," as her father puts it (231). Even more harshly than Bertram's straightforward blame, Ivah's mind is haunted by the words Eleanor said when she was alive. Yamanaka uses the ghostly presence of Eleanor in order to show the physicality of the patriarchal oppression precisely as a result of the repressed and forgotten history. Although the mother is not physically present with the Ogata family any longer, the ideological spells of maternal advice have not disappeared with the death of the mother. The Ogata children, including Ivah, still see their mother either in each other's eyes or in trivial objects in domestic space, such as their dog—whose name, Ka-san, comes from "Okasan" meaning "mother" in Japanese—and a black moth in the room:

Way inside of Ka-san's red eyes, I see her in there:
Mama. In white. Spirit mother in a long dress.
Send me out. Leave the porch light on. I'll be coming home.
I hear these words but they're already inside my head.
Then who do I see? Her long hair and feet that touch the ground. Do you
know that they're good if you see their feet?
Mama, come back. Mama. (64)

By inserting Eleanor's ghostly presence in the otherwise realist context, Yamanaka highlights the family home as a precarious place where the repressed national memories of leprosy attack the youth's consciousness. The persistent feeling that "MaMa STiLL HeRe" in conjunction with the physical absence of the mother ironically makes Ivah prematurely to strive to be a mother, in order to fill the gap between the physical absence and the ideological presence of the mother (104). Not only does Ivah see her deceased mother in Ka-san's or Maisie's eyes, but, more importantly, she does also hear her

mother's advice that was repeatedly told when Eleanor was with them. At the outset of the novel, Ivah struggles to remember her mother's advice to figure out how to be a mother by herself. Ivah says, "This is how I try to remember my Mama. I remember all the things she told me about what to do in this life" (34). Most importantly, one advice given by the mother was, "Always take care of your brother and sister" (50). The assigned role of the caretaker of the younger siblings is further forced by Bertram after Eleanor's death; to Ivah considering to leave for Honolulu to enter the Mid-Pac, Bertram warns: "No only think about yourself" (229). Still remembering her mother's advice, Ivah feels extremely guilty about leaving, which makes her hesitant. All in all, in spite of the fact that Eleanor does no longer *physically* stay with the Ogata children, her words are still haunting in Ivah's mind, urging her to perform the maternal role. Compared to *Saturday Night* girls living with authoritative parental figures who are still alive and giving them direct "advice," the exhortation given to Ivah—despite the lack of the bodily presence of the patriarchal authority—is paradoxically rendered more urgent precisely *due to* the absence.

In the process of Ivah's subject formation, the impoverished family with the particular distressing history with leprosy is projected as a major conflict that the protagonist must reconcile, in order for her to fully develop into a free, convinced subject. In *Blu's Hanging*, the condition of family is above all closely tied in with the sense of responsibility and familial duties, and the imperative justifies its oppressive natures by equating itself with love. As Ivah recollects, although the Ogatas never mention "love" in the family, the sentence, "I Love You" engraved on Ivah's golden bracelet given by Eleanor keeps reminding her of her role as a surrogate mother (101).

Surely, this particular “love” is different from love of a self-possessive individual in that the former is vertical rather than horizontal therefore it hinders the lover’s liberal individuation. To be sure, Poppy and other relatives—Aunt Betty and Big Sis—constantly inject the traditional idea that “blood is thicker than water,” and impose the idea that family is the most important. In this sense, familial love becomes suffocating to Ivah since it forces her to take care of her siblings even if it would be only at the expense of her individual wellbeing.

By deploying words that refer to, or could lead to, suffocation such as “hang,” “tie,” “choke,” and “gag” repeatedly throughout the text, Yamanaka exhibits the thin line between love and abuse, and the ambivalent natures of family. In particular, Blu—as the title, *Blu’s Hanging*, shows—is presented as the one, both physically and psychologically, obsessed with *love* including abusive, violent elements of it. Being 8-year-old, still in need of maternal warmth and the sense of belonging, and sexually curious, Blu plays games that would satisfy his want for being close to someone. He spent money to be a member of “the Archies Fan Club” and “the Olympic Sales Leadership Club” in order to “belong to something that means something to [him]” (56). Not only does Blu play Hangman (a paper and pencil guessing game drawing the image of hanged man) with Maisie, but he does also play a physical game with Uncle Paulo¹²:

¹² The issue of Yamanaka’s replicating the stereotype of Filipino men as sexual predators reappears in her first publication, *Saturday Night*. Nonetheless, I argue the novel rather complicates—and even challenges to a certain extent—the ethnic stereotypes of, and structured inequality between, “local” Japanese and “local” Filipinos in several different ways. I previously discussed how Yamanaka demystifies the superiority of “local” Japanese and introduces multiplicity of the “Japanese American,” by her deployment of a poverty-stricken Japanese protagonist, Ivah. In addition to presenting the Filipino man (Uncle Paulo) as a rapist, the novel also has the Japanese sexual predator (Mr. Iwasaki) who molested Blu. In this light, I consider the cause of all the extreme attentions and

Then I see my brother tied to the clothelines with sennit, the knots pulled so tightly that Mitchell has to use his teeth to loose them. An old T-shirt gags Blu's mouth. All of the ropes around Blu's body, his arms, and his feet cut into his skin.

Mitchell tells me, "We were playing a game of cowboys and Indians with Uncle Paulo, who suggested that we take a hostage. (153)

Although the game leaves "deep rope burns" all over his body, Blu rather enjoys the game in that it gives him a stimulus that satisfies—though temporary—his want for being tied firmly to someone. In the scene Ivah in trying to rescue her brother from being hanging and gagged hears her brother say, "Ho shit, why you guys acting all nuts? We was only having some fun" (154). Indeed, as Mitchell testifies about sexual games they had with the Reyes gang (the Reyes sisters and their Uncle Paulo), "It feels like—like no pain. Like flying"; although it may cause some physical pain, hanging out with the Reyes gang "take(s) away (psychological) pain" from Blu who is in need of love (155-56). Blu's desire for the choking bodily explorations is eventually taken advantage of by Uncle Paulo, as Blu is raped by the sexual predator:

The smothering heat of bodies in a closed car, steam on the window. My brother's gagged mouth and tied hands, his face neon white in the light of Jesus Coming Soon.

furious critiques *Blu's Hanging* has received as a "racist" text no more than a reflection—if not reinforcement—of the ethnic stereotype. Unfortunately, given the discourse of "systemic local Japanese racism," which was well documented in Fujikane's study, the Japanese Hawaiian author's repetitive representation of Filipino characters as (potential) rapists has raised many criticisms and debates amongst both activists in the local communities and scholars in the academia. As a result, after Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* won the Association for Asian American's Studies' 1998 award for excellence in fiction, the alliance of activists and critics eventually succeeded in persuading the organization to rescind the award. Although the issue of representation merits detailed discussion, I would like to put aside this debate inasmuch as my particular concern here is to examine the ways in which the Japanese Hawaiian narrative adopts and reworks the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* genre. For helpful analyses of the controversy, see Fujikane and/or Chiang.

And in that moment, Paulo's left hand around his own penis, his right hand around Blu's the slapping of flesh, Paulo spitting in his hands, and the quick jerk over skin, over skin, over skin. (247)

The younger siblings' vulnerable situations facilitates Ivah's internalization of the ideologies of her microcosm (the family's belief in the saying, "blood is thicker than water"), thus urges her to find a way suited for not only individualistic but also communal survival.

Ivah's journey to find a way to reconcile her dual conflict—not only national but also familial—manifests her particular Japanese Hawaiian adaptation of the Morettian modern socialization. Central to Morettian ideal modern socialization is the harmonious fusion of individualistic "internal impulses" and coercive "external compulsion," so much so the protagonist must come to terms with the conflict between "following one's conviction" and "giving oneself to authority." Hence, the protagonist's accomplishing *Bildung* ("maturity" in a broad sense)—or, more specifically, the protagonist's becoming part of the world—should not simply imply "the individual's total assimilation to the whole" (Moretti 61). Instead, the *Bildungsroman* rather constructs "the process of individuation as an incorporative process of socialization, without which individualism itself would be meaningless," as Slaughter cogently points out (19). In order to depict Ivah's complementary processes of individuation and socialization, Yamanaka uses the character, Miss Ito, who function as a role model. Maisie's special ED teacher, Miss Ito is the only character in the novel who has previously achieved the "actualization and stabilization of Asian American," prior to Ivah's case. Like Ivah, Miss Ito was born and spent the most of her childhood years in Moloka'i. Coming from the working-class family without the mother, Miss Ito, too, was in the position of the surrogate mother.

Miss Ito tells Ivah: “Your family reminds me of my family when I was grow up. My mother passed away when I was a little girl too. I had to care for my little sisters” (123). Moreover, like grown-up Ivah rewriting her coming-of-age story fluidly in pidgin and the standard English, Miss Ito having successfully kept her indigenous culture as well as attained the white mainstream culture speaks both languages.

“You are so condescending, Tammy, it’s pathetic. I’m a Jap to you. And my friends are all brownies. It’s written all over your face every minute of every day. I’ve had to put up with your judgment of us and your snide remarks for months now. I’m no dummy, so don’t you ever talk down to me, you undastand”—Miss Ito’s pidgin English comes out. I’ve never heard her use it. (128)

While looking at Miss Ito asserting her Hawaiian identity in talking back to the “haolified” Japanese schoolteacher—Mrs. Tammy Nishimoto—Ivah not only feels the sense of belonging with Miss Ito but also acknowledges the constructedness of the duality. As Miss Ito proves by her existence, one needs not to discard one’s own culture (i.e. pidgin) in order to attain the other (the standard English). As the Ogata children are invited to Miss Ito’s place, they have a chance to enter Miss Ito’s “the green kitchen” which in Ivah’s eyes “doesn’t know whether it’s haole or Japanese” (129). In contrast to both “haolified” schoolteachers and anti-haole “locals” who condescend upon each other, Miss Ito’s figure demonstrates an exemplary probability of the strategic mixing of “Asian,” “Hawaiian,” and “American.” Not only does Miss Ito demonstrate a possibility of such an hybrid identity, but she does also evince a desirability of the hybridity. To be sure, as opposed to Ivah who was not given any “damn clue” concerning “how to be a mama” from her own mother, Miss Ito becomes the one who breaks Maisie’s silence. At first Maisie writes to Miss Ito, and then she eventually opens her mouth at Miss Ito’s place. Ivah is, of course, surprised: “How do you get my sister to tell you all of these

things? . . . How come she tells you all of these things? Do you know that she hardly never says nothing at home?” (123). Ivah’s encounter with Miss Ito was necessary in that it finally grants our protagonist a “clue” regarding how to be at once herself and “mama.”

As someone who was educated in Honolulu and successively achieved a developmental narrative, Miss Ito suggests Ivah consider applying to Mid-Pacific Institute, a college-prep school in the city. At first, leaving her family appears to be unimaginable to Ivah, inasmuch as it does not seem to go hand in hand with preserving and protecting her family, the request from Eleanor:

What about Blu?
What about Maisie?
What about Poppy?
I don’t say this.
I rinse my hands.
I feel panic.

And then [Miss Ito] says, “Sometimes, you’ve got to let go. Otherwise, what you’re holding on to suffocates and dies. You kill yourself and the ones you love so much. You think about it, okay?” (134)

Again, Miss Ito grants a new insight to Ivah who has rigidly thought that she could take the best care of her family by simply staying with them on Moloka’i. Miss Ito’s testimony that her going to the Mid-Pac eventually “helped [her] three sisters get in—it made a big difference for all four of [them]” shows Ivah that seeking one’s autonomous individualism is not necessarily “selfish” in that it would also benefit her younger siblings in the long run (133). More importantly, Miss Ito exposes the truth behind the familial love Ivah has cherished so much that it has prevented her from seeking upward mobility. The comments that “what [Ivah is] holding on to” could possibly “suffocate” imply Ivah’s naïve assumption the particular kind of *love* would only nourish her family is wrong and could be even fatally dangerous. Of course, Miss Ito’s suggestion is

premised on her acknowledging the role and importance of education, with which one can, in turn, gain a material—let alone cultural and linguistic—competence. Were it not for her encounter with Miss Ito, Ivah would not be able to get the means (studying at the Mid-Pac), and her class status and state of dispossession, in turn, would be easily reproduced.

An irony is that the dispossessed family, in effect, comes to assist the U.S. racialized reproduction of class relations; precisely due to its disadvantaged class status, the Ogata family creates its need for physical labor within domestic space. In turn, Ivah's family as a microcosm presents this repressive system as something one should voluntarily support, as it coats this reproductive system heavily with the sense of love. This eccentric familial love that requires the sacrifice of individualistic freedom is further elaborated with the metaphor of "rope" throughout the second half of the novel. As Ivah considers applying to the Mid-Pac, Yamanaka using the imagery of "veil" and "rope" highlights Bertram's role as a patriarchal authority who aggressively hinders Ivah's individuation. Bertram is neither isolated in the leper colony nor considered contagious any longer. Although he does not have the disease, leprosy as a powerful stigma is still attached to him, and it still generates the sense of shame as well as of distrust. Without the governmental officials and medical authorities, Bertram ironically becomes the one who replicates and reinforces the theory of leprosy as hereditary or infectious.

Although Ivah is accepted and given "one of the biggest scholarships" by the Mid-Pac, Poppy at the climax of Ivah's *Bidung* narrative functions as a repressive regulator of the youth. For Bertram tries to quarantine his successor in the poverty-stricken community on Moloka'i (228). Asking his eldest daughter to stay with him

instead of leaving for Honolulu, Bertram in effect renders the disease symbolically infectious insofar as it can potentially make Ivah dispossessed too.

He stares at the scars on his hands for a long time. Draws them close to his eye and then holds them in front of him. I just sit there and watch. “I neva going to say this again, Ivah. I going draw back the veil one time and one time only for you . . .

“I ain’t eva going ask this of you again, Ivah. And you been doing so much shit around here, make me sick to think I gotta lean on you. But I only going ask you once. And I only going take you once: I like you go with me on the other side of the veil, so maybe you help me lighten my load. Help me walk on liddle bit.”

And then the veil lifts, and I start to see the other side, ropes that we need to tie ourselves with, to these chairs in the kitchen in the house in Kaunakakai. So, as Poppy says, we can find our way back from the place of memories, so good and so strong, or so bad that you want to stay to fix them, or, sometimes, forget to come back. (140-141)

By drawing back the veil, Bertram invites Ivah to go “on the other side of the veil” with him, where there is the legacy of leprosy that persistently agonizes him: the death of Eleanor, the residing stigma, and poverty. Needless to say, Bertram here tries to convince that Ivah should stay in Moloka’I and discard the educational opportunity that will help Ivah gain both cultural and economic capital. As Ivah is given this suggestion, the image of the rope revisits her. The rope as a metaphor of the familial love first symbolizes the female subject’s confinement in domestic space. On the one hand, as Poppy points out, the rope can be used to bind the family members together, making them close to one another. Nevertheless, the rope also has a fatal danger of suffocating one to death if it is wrapped around one too tight. Moreover, the rope also signifies the U.S. history of the confinement of the Japanese Hawaiian youth, in the sense that Bertram’s “load” has been mainly caused by the history of leprosy settlement.

When Poppy goes on to narrate the story behind Eleanor’s death, Ivah gets to know that it was the love that ironically killed her mother. Bertram says:

“Your madda died ‘cause each one of your faces starting with you, Ivah, made um mo’ and mo’ celar to Eleanor that she was neva going back Kalaupapa. So she kept taking, and taking, and taking the sulfone drug [in order to cure leprosy] even way after she was declared negative. And the bugga wen’ eat and eat at her kidney—wen’ nag her for years—but she kept taking the sulfone so she would neva have to go back there without you kids, so that she neva abandon her kids like her family did her.
... Was love wen’ kill my Ella. Love for *you*.” (145).

To be sure, Eleanor’s tragic death was caused by the strong maternal desire to keep her nuclear family that she had painfully achieved with Bertram. It is suggestive that the way the drug functioned with Eleanor is analogous to the way the rope would work with her daughter, Ivah. While both could be considered a necessity for the construction and preservation of a family, both could also put a female subject of the family in fatal danger. This analogy between the sulfone drug and the rope provides a sense of foreboding of another potential tragic ending for Ivah, unless she denies repeating her forebear’s footsteps. As Ivah senses the precarious aspect of the rope, her narration finally has a transition. Now her mind reads: “Mama, let go of the rope” (146).

Since her encounter with the family’s history of leprosy, Ivah’s internal monologue repeatedly shows her resistance:

Leave, I want to leave.
At Mid-Pac, no laundry, no cooking. (151)

Let me go, let me be normal.
Don’t wanna be a Mama too. (157)

Ivah’s growing desire not to forgo her autonomous selfhood is also demonstrated through her mind’s work of untying the rope by loosening the knots: “I loose the knots in the rope that tie [Blu] to me, and let the rope fall away (162). After that the rope finally goes away from the mind’s eyes of Ivah: “there’ no more rope to hold [Blu]” (174). More importantly, the novel presents two crucial moments for Ivah’s reaching a resolution of

the conflicts. One is the scene where the Ogata children watch the mother stone give birth to a child-stone at the Eleanor's grave on Mother's Day. The scene combining the family's leprosy history and the children's miraculous, unrealistic perspective grants the later generation the agency to comfort the distressed soul of Eleanor and to further self-fashion their identity. Ivah records the moment: "the mother-stone is about to give birth, I see the child-stone inside her with my own eye . . . The child-stone spins inside the mother-stone, a red and white swirl . . . when the child (stone) is born, there are no scars left on the mother-stone" (177). The Ogata children's observing the birth scene—no matter how unbelievable it may sound—subversively generates a self-representation of the repressed, which contrasts to the image of the lepers and their offspring as the inherently incapable and infectious. As Blu confirms, "Even after all that, the Mama-stone (has) no more scars and the babies (are) perfect" (178).

Before Ivah finally makes the decision to leave for Honolulu, the novel provides the protagonist's internal narration that epitomizes Ivah's conflicting, troubled consciousness. While alternating with the voice of the oppressive figure written in italics, the protagonist's desire to seek her individualistic selfhood is voiced out:

*Who going cook for [Blu and Maisie]?
Who comes first in your life?
Family always comes first.
Should I stay?
I want to go.
You betta live with what you choose.
Mama, teach how to be Ivah too.
Me, Me, Me, thass all you think about. (244)*

At the end of the lengthy narration though which she recollects fragmented, uncompromising voices, Ivah imagines a dialogue with her mother which happens mysteriously in her mind:

Mama, we never go in without an answer.
Only you and I can figure this one out.
You're the only one with all the answers, remember? . . .
Smoke hangs on the still night. Mama's a cloud shape that moves into the
form of a mother, a shape that funnels as it forms. I've seen this with my eyes
open and clear.
"Go, Ivah," my Mama says. "Save yourself." (244-45)

At the moment of resolution, Yamanaka provides her protagonist with the agency to make a compromise, an accomplishment otherwise nearly impossible for Ivah in the wake of the historical contradiction. Only after Ivah hears—or rather contrives to hear—her mother's approval does the narrative finally reach a resolution. Ivah's self-inventing her freedom through imagining her mother's approval demonstrates that the ways in which the teenage daughter of the leprosy victims has come to embrace her multilateral society whose histories filled with traumatic traces and repressed memories of leprosy. In order for the hybrid protagonist to accomplish compromise, the concerns for communal survival could not be discarded, therefore she had to invent a way that would nourish the fortunes of both her family and herself. Although the liberatory statement, "Go . . . Save yourself," is presented as externally dictated by her mother on the surface, the mysterious moment of resolution simultaneously renders the statement of Ivah's own. The protagonist's forging her freedom in the scene thus signals her becoming of a convinced subject, finally capable of plotting her own life story.

Yamanaka's deployment of leprosy in *Blu's Hanging* is truly strategic, deeply grounded in another history of Asian and Native Hawaiian exclusion having taken place particularly in Hawai'i. If Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* highlights the history of Grandpa Leong, an early Chinese immigrant worker who had to stay as a bachelor due to the gendered Asian exclusion Acts, Yamanaka's text thematizes another side of the U.S.

exclusion of Asians by focusing on the history of Kalaupapa (re)producing leprous, infectious bodies of underprivileged Asian Hawaiians. Both Ng's and Yamanaka's *Bildungsromane* demonstrate the ways in which the supposedly democratic nation-state systematically prevents those Americans of Asian descents from attaining the American ideals and from being included in the normative citizenry over the course of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. As the nation-state did not allow the early Asian immigrants (Grandpa Leong; Bertram and Eleanor) to build a normative bourgeois family, the later generations of the racial group as inheritors of the repressive histories had to face hardships as they seek to achieve an Asian American modern socialization without any given instrument of appropriation from the old. In particular, narrated from the perspective of a child belonging to one of the dispossessed families, *Blu's Hanging* illuminates not only the ways in which the nation-state creates the systematic discrimination of the minority group but also the ways in which the oppressive system is reproduced and reinforced by smaller social institutions (local community and family). While demonstrating the possibility of "Asian Hawaiian American" coexistence, Yamanaka deconstructs, and particularizes, the binary of "Asian" and "American," historically construed as mutually exclusive by the U.S. nation-state on multiple levels. Provided that an Asian American attainment of possessive individualism seems limited only to materially opulent protagonist (such as Eric Liu in *Accidental Asian*), Ivah's self-appropriating the means for personal and ethnic competence through the imagining of the liberatory voice was truly a meaningful gesture amongst diverse Asian American *Bildungsromane*.

CHAPTER V

DEMYSTIFYING THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE AMERICAN DREAM: THE OPULENT ASIAN AMERICAN SIBLINGS' COMPETITIVE *BILDUNGSROMAN* IN AMY CHUA'S *BATTLE HYMN OF THE TIGER MOTHER*

Time magazine's August 31, 1987 issue featured a cover story by David Brand on a stereotype of Asian Americans that has arisen anew since the late 1960s. Entitled "The New Whiz Kids," the article was dedicated to explore the "model minority" phenomenon and thus tried to explain why Americans of Asian descent seem to prosper better than other minority groups in this country. The key words used to explain the phenomenon were "dedication, family support and discipline" (44). As the article pointed out with a 1984 study done by Stanford Sociologist Sanford Dornbusch, Asian American students put in an average of 4 more hours a week to study compared with other students, and it is mainly because of Asian American parents' dedicated attention to their children (45). While this article—unquestionably predicated on the assumption of Asian American success—feeds on the myth of "model minority" and obliterates the diverse socio-historical statuses of Asian Americans, it highlights the role of parental involvement in the contemporary Asian American generation's becoming a "model minority." About three decades after *Time*'s article gained public attention, Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011) came out, depicting the writer's dedicated, or rather coercive, parenting experience that sheds light on the point already made in *Time*'s article: "Some

Asian Americans may be pushing their children too hard”¹³ (44). A mother of Chinese decent and Yale law professor who strived to get tickets to Carnegie Hall and Ivy League schools for her two daughters through extremely authoritative parenting, Chua in her memoir displays the strategies that the “Chinese mother” ought to use in order to raise successful kids. Also called the “tiger mother,” this particular parental authority figure would believe “schoolwork always comes first” therefore she would do anything to have her child satisfy her high expectations and goals (5). Allowing her child not to get any grade less than an A and not to do any activity in which the child could not eventually win a gold medal should suffice to crystallize Chua’s model of “Chinese parenting”—let alone calling your child a “garbage” if the child behaves below your expectations, as Chua actually did to her youngest daughter, Lulu. Resonating with the American media’s production of the Asian American stereotype of “model minority,” Chua’s book voluntarily confirms the reciprocal relationships between Asian American “whiz kids” and “tiger moms.”

Chua’s book already excited extreme reactions from the public three days before the book’s official publication. *The Wall Street Journal* ran Chua’s story of parenting as an abridged article (“Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior”) on January 8, 2011, and what Chua conceptualizes as “Chinese parenting” quickly became a national controversy; it excited both popular media (including TV shows—CNN, *Today Show*, *The Colbert Report*, just to name a few—and SNN such as Facebook and Twitter) and academics (including scholars of Asian American studies and pedagogy in particular, children’s rights activists and teachers at large). According to the *Journal*, only within a week after

¹³ This statement was spoken by a Chinese American interviewee and high schooler in NYC who had been supposedly experiencing “Chinese parenting,” in Chua’s terms.

the article's publication, it had already generated more comments than any other article on the *Journal's* web site in the history of *WSJ.com*; there were already more than 5,700 comments posted by January 14 ("Our Readers Roar"). What infuriated the general public the most were by and large Chua's extreme, near-abusive parenting methods that more or less go against quintessential American ideals: the respect for individualistic freedom, autonomy, and independence. Surely, not letting your child choose their own extracurricular activities and instead forcing her to play violin for hours without a break against her own will have nothing to do with the spirit of freedom or of independence, which this country highly values. As one reader expresses his opinion on January 15-16, 2011 of *Journal*, Chua's parenting methods are "demonic and inhuman," let alone *un-American* ("Our Readers Roar"). However, is what constitutes "Chinese parenting" only antithetical to the American ideals? If readers carefully observe Chua's rationale for such a coercive parenting, they would notice the deprivation of choice (the *un-American*) ironically meets the American ideals. To clarify, Chua considers her seemingly unconstitutional parenting rather liberating, and respectful for children, in the sense that only through "Chinese parenting" would the children enable to attain the highest level of *Bildung*. To be sure, "Chinese parenting," after all, seeks to lead the youth to find the most effective, quickest ways to achieve one's full potential, which would in turn generate not only material success but also psychological happiness of the child.

Due to the fact that Chua's book mainly focuses on the process of the author's parenting experiences with her daughters, the question of *Battle Hymn's* genre has been a debate. Although Chua clearly specified in an interview that *Battle Hymn* is "not a parenting book (but) a memoir, " some people are still willing to categorize it as *how to*

guide or *self-help* (more specifically, “parenting guide”) rather than *memoir* due to its subject matter (Friedman 71). No matter whether Chua’s parenting memoir is categorized as memoir, how to guide, or self-help, *Battle Hymn*, above all, offers coming-of-age stories of two third-generation Chinese American girls, Sophia and Lulu. While both Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging* and Chua’s *Battle Hymn* delve into the topic of child development and education, the contrast between the two *Bildungsromane* is rather evident. Let alone the class difference in the families, the former is written by the daughter herself in the absence of the mother while the latter is vicariously narrated by the mother, Amy Chua. Not only is the unique narrative of *Bildung* in *Battle Hymn* vicariously composed by the protagonists’ mother, but the course of the children’s *Bildung* narrative is thoroughly controlled by the mother’s efforts to secure the future generation’s prosperity. Accordingly, Chua’s *Battle Hymn*, published about a decade after the arrival of the new millennium, suggestively signals another turning point in the evolution of the Asian American *Bildungsroman* that has heavily focused on the voice of the pronoun, “I”.

Either fictional or non-fictional, the literary tradition of the contemporary Asian American *Bildungsroman*, often narrated in the first-person singular perspective, has strived to negotiate two modes of discourse: the Asian American subject’s contrasting desires to be exceptional, distinctive from the umbrella stereotypes of Asian otherness and to be representative of the family and the community who were under the direct influences of the stereotypes as a racial minority. While narrating the particular history of their parents who more or less represent a specific group of Asian Americans, my previous protagonists—Leila (the legislative history of Asian exclusion), Liu (his

parents' history of "half-finished acculturation" due to the contradiction of "Chineseness" and "Americanness"), and Ivah (the history of leprosy settlement)—all struggle to articulate their individualistic desire to resist the historical contradiction of "Asian" and "American." Especially in the evolution of the Asian American *Bildungsroman*, the autobiographical writing has rivaled the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman*, as Eric Liu's *Accidental Asian* (1999) exemplifies. The phenomenon was by and large caused by the fact that the non-fiction genre (autobiography) generates the sovereign self by employing the first-person singular stance. Like its fictional counterpart (the *Bildungsroman*), autobiography allows a construction of the liberal subject in dialectical relation to the particular society in which (s)he inhabits. While utilizing autobiographical writing in the narrative of Asian American subject formation, the writers not only intervene in the traditional *Bildungsroman* form but also transform Asian American subjecthood. In addition to Liu's re-deployment of autobiographical form in his *assimilative Bildungsroman*, earlier (semi-)autobiographies such as Carlos Bulosan's *America Is In the Heart* (1946) and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975) would serve as "classic" examples of such generic transformations. In particular, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*—one of the most read and taught Asian American texts within and outside the academy—offers an autobiographical counterpart to Chua's *Battle Hymn* as Kingston's memoir portrays an Asian American female coming-of-age from the perspective of the daughter. In contrast with "classic" Asian American texts (either autobiographies or novels of subject formation) which cohesively highlight the personal agency of the narrator as "I", Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn* re-transforms the literary tradition of the Asian American *Bildungsroman*; Chua utilizes both the literary point-of-

view and the material power of the parent (tiger mom) as a critical medium for the Asian American youth's claiming of political and social agency. In writing *Battle Hymn*, Chua intervenes in both the traditional *Bildungsroman* and the conventional Asian American autobiography, and the author thus invents a unique genre of subject formation, which I categorize as a *competitive Bildungsroman*. As Chua asserts, her parenting methods derive from her strong belief that childhood is "a training period, a time to build character and invest for the future," and children themselves do not know what is good for them due to their immaturity (97). Chua's text cogently argues it is not an absolute freedom or independence but a *limitation* of them that would first make the youth competitive in the liberal free market society, and then eventually grant the youth those ideals in the long run.

More specifically, Chua's *competitive Bildungsroman* of Sophia and Lulu is thoroughly governed by the mother's schemes to train the protagonists to be near-professional classical musicians: Sophia as a pianist and Lulu as a violinist. In other words, the tiger mom's conceptualization of *Bildung* is incisively predicated on her belief in the innate values of European classical music. As the memoir progresses, it presents two separate *Bildung* narratives; while it describes how Sophia achieves her (mother's) goal by making it to Carnegie Hall, it also tells the story of how Lulu (re)gains her individualistic freedom by choosing not to be the concertmaster, rebelling against her mother's original plan. As such, Chua's book first presents the "battle" between the mother and her daughters as a narrative conflict of the particular *Bildungsroman*. In turn, it produces two opposite resolutions of "Chinese parenting." Particularly from the mother's perspective, Sophia signifies a success of her achieving the particular *Bildung*

(European classical music) while Lulu eventually ends up being a failure. Interestingly, however, both Sophia's and Lulu's narratives come to manifest the model of modern socialization in two different ways. If one examines the seemingly opposite outcomes from the vantage points of the daughters, they portray two different achievements of *Bildung*: 1) success as a form of material competence, and 2) maturity as a claiming of liberal ideals of the individual's inalienable freedoms and rights. In this light, I argue the memoir's portrayal of the siblings' two contrary, competitive developments points to the twofold meanings of Americanness, the economic and the political. As the economic, Americanness is tantamount to "whiteness" as possessive societal power that secures one's social class; Sophia's making it to Carnegie Hall as a classical pianist signifies her attainment of Americanness as the economic. On the other hand, Lulu's regaining of her freedom (to choose *not* to be a classical violinist as her mother wished) signals her claiming of Americanness as a political ethos that valorizes one's ability to choose, and thus to manifest liberal individuality.

Chua's memoir seems to demonstrate the girls' improbability to achieve Americanness as a logical entity, both as the economic and the political, and thus entitles us to question the natures and conditions of possessive individualism particularly in the context of contemporary American society. Is it truly possible for one to be a possessive individual? If so, what is a prerequisite for the ideal modern socialization? If one is to be possessive, what is the indicator? Worth noting is that what Sophia has gained equals what Lulu has relinquished, and vice versa. While Lulu had to relinquish "whiteness" as a form of cultural capital in order to self-fashion herself as a politically liberal subject making her own choice, Sophia seemed to sacrifice individualistic freedom, being an

obedient child following her mother's disciplines without experiencing much conflict. Although Sophia's and Lulu's achievements both bear witness to Americanness as national ideals in two different ways, the text seems to shore up Lulu's narrative more so than Sophia's. For Lulu is the one who claims "self-possession" even if it is to sacrifice possession of other properties (such as being a professional concertmaster and receiving economic and cultural capital from the prestigious position).

Crucial to our two protagonists' coming-of-age stories is the "tiger mother" who unhesitatingly and aggressively involves in the girls' development. According to Chua, "tiger mother"—which the author uses interchangeably with "Chinese mother"—is a parent who sticks to "Chinese parenting," and it is not necessarily gender- or race-specific:

I'm using the term "Chinese" mother" loosely. I recently met a supersuccessful white guy from South Dakota (you've seen him on television), and after comparing notes we decided that his working-class father had definitely been a Chinese mother. I know some Korean, Indian, Jamaica, Irish, and Ghanaian parents who qualify too. Conversely, I know some mothers of Chinese heritage, almost always born in the West, who are not Chinese mothers, by choice or otherwise. (4)

Although Chua's parenting model may seem too extreme within the American context and thus may be considered foreign or *un-American*, "tiger mother" is rather a classist—if not entirely racial or gendered—phenomenon; a tiger mom, Chua thus argues, does not have to be of Chinese descent, or of a specific gender. More importantly, the final objective of the tiger mother is grounded in the desire for generational upward mobility as well as the belief in the child's maximum potential. By the same token, a Health Policy Scholar at Harvard University, Hilary Levey Friedman points out in her review of Chua's book, "Lions, Tigers, and Bear Moms—Oh, My!" that Chua's "Chinese" parenting

model is “not a foreign concept within a distinctly middle-class American parenting sensibility” (70). One would easily be able to find “American” counterparts from “college admissions frenzy” or “celebrated young tennis and golf phenoms,” as Friedman remarks. More importantly, I argue the crux of the “tiger mom” philosophy—which, in essence, proposes *Dream bigger, have higher expectations, and work hard to achieve them*—ironically mirrors the supposedly universal American ideals, despite the obvious geographical marker in the term (“*Chinese* parenting” as opposed to “*Western* parenting”). Given the similarities between the concepts of the “tiger mom” and the “American Dream,” this chapter asks questions about reflective relationships between the Asian (“tiger mom”) and the American (“American Dream”): What are the natures and conditions of “Chinese parenting”? In what socio-historical contexts does it arise? Who is qualified to be a “tiger mom”? What role does “Chinese parenting” play to the subject formation of the contemporary Asian American youth? More importantly, what does the removal of the first-person singular stance in Chua’s *Battle Hymn* signify? After all, what does Chua’s generic transformations of the two traditional genres teach us about the “American Dream”?

The paradigm of tiger mom is a useful tool to examine the ways in which Asian Americans actively influence the American identity and vice versa. Consider, for instance, this line: “They have almost a maniacal attitude if they just work hard enough, they can do it.” Included in *Time*’s “New Whiz Kids” as a testimony spoken by a New York’s Baruch college counselor, this was supposedly a description of a “tiger mom” and her “model minority” child (49). One would say almost the same line if asked to thematize the “American Dream.” Above all, the “American Dream” valorizes hard-

working citizens by forging the ideology that hard-work will eventually bring success. In the context of the afore-mentioned discussions, this chapter aims to explore “tiger mother” as a contested site where the American ideals and Asian stereotypes clash and collapse into each other. Having been influenced by both the American ideals and the Confucian ideology, “tiger mom” is neither exclusively Chinese nor American, but instead a hybrid cultural phenomenon. An epitome of at once ever-changing Asian stereotypes (“yellow peril,” “model minority,” and then “tiger mom” as a variety of one essence) and American middle-class obsessions, “tiger mom” subverts the binary of “Asian” and “American” that has been historically construed as mutually exclusive. In order to interrogate the binary of “Asian” and “American,” Chua invents a particular American stereotype of Asian otherness, tiger mother. While utilizing the tiger mom as a structural necessity of the *competitive Bildungsroman* of her two daughters, Chua challenges the American idealized cultural assumption behind the “American Dream.”

Tiger mom’s combative entering the Western literary genre of the *Bildungsroman* thus creates a unique contemporary Asian American narrative of *Bildung*. Chua’s *Battle Hymn* shares some commonalities with the Asian American *Bildungsromane* I discussed in the previous chapters, in the sense that central to the Asian American *Bildung* protagonists’ coming-of-age is the old generation’s active involvement, which in turn takes away individualistic freedoms from the Asian American youth. Nonetheless, my reading of Chua’s *Bildungsroman* proves the specific patterns of generational interventions vary depending on the social class of each protagonist’s family. For instance, Ng’s *Bone* and Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging* portray the familial interventions particularly as the feelings of duty, obligation, and responsibility to the old, which are

more or less caused and intensified by the families' dispossession of material resources. While utilizing the dual narrative structure of the child and parents relationship, *Bone* and *Blu's Hanging* further highlight how the nation-state, controlling immigration and leprosy, is at the center of the root cause of the generational conflicts Leila and Ivah must reconcile. In contrast to the previous texts, Sophia and Lulu's coming-of-age narratives in *Battle Hymn* is deeply grounded in the possession of material resources. With the predecessor's excessive interventions and material supports, *Battle Hymn* manifests both becoming and un-becoming of a possessive individual through the contrasting coming-of-age stories of Sophia and Lulu. By rewarding Sophia who has given up individualistic autonomy with a possession of a cultural capital, Chua's text exposes the illogic of possessive assumptions that are presumed in the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman* and in contemporary American society. It shows if one is to possess properties and potentials, one must be equipped with generational interventions, which in turn fatally questions one's ability to self-possess. Chua's text, revising the generic conventions of both the classical *Bildungsroman* and the Asian American autobiography, thus exposes a non-universality of possessive assumptions of the *Bildungsroman* and the "American dream."

"Chinese parenting," central to the contrasting journeys of *Battle Hymn*'s two protagonists, is symptomatic of the feeling of economic insecurity shared by Asians in the United States as a racial group whose rights to possess had been denied by the exclusive immigration laws until the mid-twentieth century. What Chua calls "Chinese parenting" is a product of not only the obsessions of the American middle-class but also

the aspirations of the Asian American matriarchy/patriarchy to stabilize her/his kinship's future prosperity in the adopted homeland. One must bear in mind "Chinese parenting" is a historical phenomenon which reflects a particular momentum of Asian American history in the mid- 1960s. As an authoritative, yet gender-neutral, figure who exerts "Chinese parenting," "tiger mom" represents those Americans of Asian-born scholars and professionals whose influx to the U.S. tremendously changed the demographic of the Asian American communities by 1965 onward. As scholars of Asian American studies point out, 1965 was the significant year for the Asian America due to the new immigration law that opened the door to Asian immigrants. Not only did it cause an increasing number of Asians in the U.S. but it was also the immigration law with certain preferences that prefer those Asians with high educational backgrounds (Wong; Dirlik). By and large from middle-class family background and bilingual, these Asian-born academics, unlike many of the earlier Asian immigrants, "were less likely to keep silent in the face of discrimination, and more likely to add their voices to calls for Asian American empowerment" as Arif Dirlik cogently describes (10). Indeed, the presence of the educated Asian professionals has come to bear witness to continuities—rather than disjunctures—between "Asian" and "American" in that those Asian immigrants have higher expectations for social mobility, which this country publicly promises even more so in the wake of the civil rights movements. And "Chinese parenting" is one Asian American invention and means through which, the later Asian immigrants believe, their future generations could achieve what the "American Dream" self-proclaims.

As a methodology invented and revised by several generations of Asian American parents, "Chinese parenting" sheds light on the liberties and limitations of both American

and Asian cultures. One may conjecture “Chinese parenting” may be “an (Asian) immigrant thing,” which could be seen in “a lot of non-Chinese parents—usually from Korea, India, or Pakistan,” as Chua testifies (54). Chua emphasizes that “Chinese parenting” is not invented by her generation (the second generation born and raised in the U.S.), but rather by her parents who had direct experiences with the home country. Specifically, as for Chua’s own upbringing, her “tiger mom” was not her mother, but her father. First of all, the story of Chua’s father, exemplifying an Asian American achievement of possessive individual, shows how the publicly acclaimed American ideals aid the immigrant subject to self-fashion his identity anew in his adopted homeland. Being in China, her father was “the family outlaw, risk-taking and rebellious.” As Chua goes on to say, “To put it mildly, his mother didn’t respect his choices, value his individualism, or worry about his self-esteem—all those Western clichés” (211-2). And it was his desire for “all those Western clichés” that made him to migrate to the U.S. as an international student at the MIT. The story of Chua’s father is eventually rendered an example of the self-made man as he became an internationally known scholar and professor of chaos theory. This progressive story (from a poor immigrant student who could not even afford his electric bill to a cosmopolitan character traveling around the world to give lectures) definitely bears witness to an eventuality of the “American Dream,” although only allowed for a selected few. Meanwhile, her father’s story further illuminates the first immigrant generation’s desire to secure the later generation’s competence as he decided to use “Chinese parenting” in raising his daughters. It is an irony that Chua’s father, who rebelled against his mom’s “Chinese parenting,” became “a Chinese patriarch” in his relationship to his daughters, not allowing them to fully enjoy

“all those Western clichés” he advocated for the self-fashioning of his own identity (17). The story of Chua’s father as a whole exhibits the hybridity of “Chinese parenting.” His story, in conjunction with Chua’s own, demonstrates the ways in which Asian American subjects have adapted the “Asian” (Confucian cultural values) in order to achieve the “American” (the American Dream). In so doing, *Battle Hymn* presents “Chinese parenting” as the very site where the contrasting cultures of original and adopted homelands clash and collapse into each other. Although Chua fought him and eventually won her own choices (choosing Harvard instead of Berkeley near her parents’ home; choosing a Jewish husband, Jed, instead of a Chinese husband as her father expected), her father did not intend to allow choices of her own. By re-appropriating her father’s “Chinese parenting” more severely, Chua shows a female (“tiger mom”) could also be the figure of authoritative parenting. As Chua writes, “[she] was determined to raise an obedient Chinese child—in the West, obedience is associated with dogs and the caste system, but in Chinese culture, it is considered among the highest of virtues” (12).

Chua’s defense of the Confucian value of obedience is mainly based on her belief in the superiority of parental career advice and her desire to guarantee the future generation’s social mobility. One of her greatest fears is the generational decline, succinctly explained in the old Chinese saying that “prosperity can never last for three generations” (20). According to her explanation of the “generational decline” scenario, the hard-working mentality and high-achieving outcomes of the first (Chua’s parents) and second (Chua) generations would hardly likely repeat when it comes to the third generation (Sophia and Lulu). As for two major reasons, Chua first blames “the great comforts of the upper middle class” which the first two generations have achieved

through hard-working. Nonetheless, bigger problems, as Chua goes on to narrate, are “individual rights guaranteed by the U.S Constitution” which encourage the American youth to “disobey their parents and ignore career advice” (22). Chua’s critique of presumably humanitarian American ideals goes on:

America seems to convey something to kids that Chinese culture doesn’t. In Chinese culture, it just wouldn’t occur to children to question, disobey, or talk back to their parents. In American culture, kids in books, TV shows, and movies constantly score points with their snappy backtalk and independent streaks. Typically, it’s the parents who need to be taught a life lesson—by their children. (24)

Being a tiger mom in American culture thus becomes a challenge because it means “[y]ou have to go up against an entire value system—rooted in the Enlightenment, individual autonomy, child development theory, and the Universal Declaration of Human rights” (161). By contrasting “Chinese” and “American” cultures and value systems, Chua entitles her audience to re-think the role of the quintessentially American ideals to the cultivation of the youth in practice. By boldly arguing what this country valorizes (individual rights and freedoms of choice) as theoretical ideals would do the opposite to what it publicly guarantees, Chua re-conceptualizes the values of freedom and independence by questioning actual effects of the national ideals. In so doing, the author critically sheds light on the reality of the U.S. where the laissez-faire policy does not evenly secure our youth’s competence. Without the ideal relation between the youth and society (the liberal government at large and “Western” parents with the laissez-faire parenting), the youth would not be able to achieve a developmental modern socialization. In this light Chua’s valorization of parental career advice, or “Chinese parenting” in general, should be understood as an Asian American counteraction against the non-universality of American liberalism.

Chua's competitive *Bildungsroman* of her two girls posits "Chinese parenting" as a structural necessity therefore, in turn, it fatally questions the natures of *Bildung* (Americanness as either a possession of cultural capital or a possession of oneself) the protagonists are about to achieve. In the Morettian classical *Bildungsroman*, nothing is more emphasized than individualistic freedom and autonomy as a condition of the birth of a possessive individual as a *Bildungsroman* hero; by highlighting the importance of "an uncertain exploration of social space" as opposed to merely replicating "one's father's work," Moretti shows the poisonous effects of vertical relations (either inherited privilege or hereditary burden) upon the actualization of the liberal concepts of freedom and autonomy (4). In Chua's *competitive Bildungsroman*, European classical music particularly epitomizes both a means and objective of *Bildung* in the sense that it helps the youth not only attain a material, capitalistic success but also achieve a humanitarian development.

Nonetheless, Chua's deployment of classical music to vicariously design her daughters' fortunes becomes questionable because classical music is an institution that is, after all, designed to relinquish liberal ideas of freedom and autonomy. As a major tactic for her "antidecline campaign," Chua chose European classical music for her daughters' education. In the following passage she explains the rationale:

That's one of the reasons that I insisted Sophia and Lulu do classical music. I know that I couldn't artificially make them feel like poor immigrant kids. There was no getting around the fact that we lived in a large old house, owned two decent cars, and stayed in nice hotels when we vacationed. But I could make sure that Sophia and Lulu were deeper and more cultivated than my parents and I were. Classical music was the opposite of decline, the opposite of laziness, vulgarity, and spoiledness. It was a way for my children to achieve something I hadn't. But it was also a tie-in to the high cultural tradition of my ancient ancestors. (22-23)

As Chua points out, classical music above all epitomizes “cultivat(ion),” whose attainment would secure one’s socio-economic status. Nonetheless, one must bear in mind classical music as a token of cultural capital is not only class- but also race-specific. Needless to say, one needs to be economically qualified in order to enter the field. More importantly, the particular kind of “cultivation” already assumes the hierarchy between Western and Eastern cultural values.

Asian American families’ obsessions with their children’s pursuit of classical music are part of the “model minority” stereotype, and Chua is definitely not the only one who insisted classical music training as a way to secure her daughters’ socio-economic status. When people talk about the “model minority” phenomenon and their intellectual accomplishments, success stories of Asians in classical music always come to the fore. For instance, when *Time* introduces “Asian American Whiz Kids” to general American public, it includes the stories of the three Ahn sisters who were all admitted to Juilliard’s pre-college division (Chua’s plan for Lulu, which did not happen); it also includes a picture in which the two of the Korean American girls pose with their musical instruments: one sitting at a piano, the other holding a violin (Chua’s instrument choices for Sophia and Lulu) (44). Given the repetitive pattern, one may wonder why and how classical music has come to signify *Bildung* (“cultivation,” “development,” or “success”) to Asians. An American studies professor and former professional pianist, Mari Yoshihara provides a historicized explanation of Asian obsessions with Western classical music in *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music*. According to Yoshihara, Asian obsessions with classical music were by and large shaped by the influence of Western imperialism, modernization, and globalization upon

Asian countries. In particular, Yoshihara makes an interesting point that classical music has come to signify at once materialistic and anti-materialistic ideals. To elaborate, classical music, on the one hand, signifies “a form of cultural capital that promises upward social mobility and a place in the Western and global world”; on the other, classical music simultaneously implies “anti-commercialist, anti-materialist, art-for-art’s sake ideals” with its supposed “embrace of universal humanism” and “faith in the transcendent power of art” (6-7). Yoshihara’s explanation of classical music’s twofold—though seemingly contradictory—significance is telling. For it sheds light on the ways in which classical music retains the wide, inclusive meanings of *Bildung* in the age of late capitalism—from the traditional eighteenth-century German meaning of a humanistic cultivation of self in a broad sense, to the nineteenth-century English and the twentieth-century-onward American meaning of a material success—which can be crystallized as the concept of civilization. Particularly in the context of Asian American subjectivity classical music has come to function as an emblem of intellectual and economic advancement which will secure the group’s social status.

All in all, classical music signifies race-specific socio-economic power: whiteness. As Liu’s *assimilative Bildungsroman* nicely captures, “whiteness” is originated from “the culture of the (white) influential class,” and as the world publicly announced the demise of biological race/racism, a selected few non-white subjects become to claim the “white” culture in order to achieve societal success (Liu 52). While Liu’s *assimilative Bildungsroman* represents whiteness specifically as the customs and predilections of “white” Americans (such as English, social etiquette, table manners), Chua’s *competitive Bildungsroman* uses classical music as its crucial means for

whiteness; in both cases, whiteness is rendered an object of possession grounded in the subject's material competence. Deploying Western classical music as a major means for social mobility thus becomes tantamount to replicating a white identity, as in the case of Liu's *The Accidental Asian* where the protagonist has "become white . . . by acclamation" (Liu 34).

The danger inherent in this particular model of subject formation (the assimilation into "whiteness") is that it always assumes the superiority of the culture one yearns to assimilate to. To Chua the Western musical instruments—the piano and the violin—have a number of progressive meanings. First of all, they signify "depth and virtuosity"; they encourage the development of not only humanitarian minds but also technical skills (9). Unlike the recorder (her father-in-law's suggestion), the gong or any other "Eastern" musical instruments (her mother-in-law's), the piano and the violin are, Chua asserts, "highly difficult," thus "meaningful" (9). By the time Chua was about to decide an instrument for Lulu, her mother-in-law, Florence, fascinated by gamelan music after making a trip to Indonesia threw out some suggestions for Lulu. They were several percussive instruments used in gamelan music, including "the *kempul* (a set of hanging goings of different pitches), the *saron* (a bit metal xylophone) or the *bonang* (a bunch of kettles that are played like drums but sound more like chimes)" (40). Having certain assumptions of gamelan music, Chua rejected all the suggestions:

Maybe the reason I can't appreciate gamelan music, which I heard when we visited Indonesia in 1992, is that I fetishize difficulty and accomplishment . . . Gamelan music is mesmerizing because it is so simple, unstructured, and repetitious. By contrast, Debussy's brilliant compositions reflect complexity, ambition, ingenuity, design, conscious harmonic exploration—and yes, gamelan influences, at least in some of [Debussy's] works. It's like the difference between a bamboo hut, which has its charm, and the Palace of Versailles. (41)

Despite the long history and virtuosity of gamelan music in its own ways, Chua misrepresents gamelan music by wrongfully evincing its lack of difficulty, accomplishment, or structure. Chua's unfair comparison of gamelan music and Debussy bears witness to the societal power of classical music as a system of thought that has structured global history and power relations beyond the Western world and white bodies. With its structured image as a globalizing territory of high culture and upper-middle-class society, classical music has led non-Western subjects to internalize its assumptions (Yoshihara 6).

In the end, an Asian American deployment of classical music as a structural addition to its *Bildungsroman* cannot serve for its achievement of possessive individualism. Rather, classical music as particularly “white” capital represents the old-world aristocratic society where the *Bildungsroman* does not—and could not—exist. While classical music to Chua is a symbol of “excellence, refinement, and depth,” it is also an emblem of “respect for hierarchy, standards, and expertise” as well as of “control” over generational decline and your children (208). With its innate conservative values, classical music above all intends to create and reinforce hierarchy, or status quo, by artfully controlling individuality. The exclusiveness of classical music can also be demonstrated by the fact that it often assumes a privileged youth—either a genius figure or someone from an economically stable family in its narrative. As a symbol of at once cultivation and discipline, the piano and the violin perfectly suit the “Chinese parenting” model, which is incisively predicated on the reciprocal relationship between coercive, authoritative parent and obedient, respectful child. Along with the parental involvement, one of the other crucial elements to classical music training vis-à-vis “Chinese parenting”

is a prestigious instructor, and this another layer of vertical relationship further proves *Battle Hymn*'s disabling of liberal individuality. First, "Chinese parenting" would not be able to succeed without a help of an instructor who actually trains the child, and teaches the youth virtuous skills. Chua's detailed records of her daughters' endless practices and following debates with an authoritative instructor (the fiery debate between Lulu and Mrs. Kazinsky would be a good example) evidently show classical music training is designed for *controlling*—neither exterminating nor tolerating—individuality. Through a series of disciplines, classical musician is trained to be a genius, if not being born as one.

The generic structure of classical music training, in this sense, ironically reflects the Morettian "modern socialization," whereby individuation and socialization reconcile each other. In the paradigm of Morettian classical *Bildungsroman*, a restless youth becomes a mature adult as one can hardly distinguish one's desire for individuality from the society's demands. In other words, one gains an individual autonomy as one becomes part of pre-existing society, not as one radically separates oneself from it. Particularly in the case of the concertmaster, an orchestra is a microcosm of society at large, inasmuch as the harmonization of the band as a whole is tremendously important for its actualization. By the same token, success to a classical musician mostly comes thanks to the existence of social institutions not to one's innate abilities. To clarify, becoming a professional classical musician is often made possible because of the power of pre-existing institutions of classical music (whether it be having private lessons with classical musicians who already gained fame or entering prestigious schools). The fact that obedient Sophia eventually made it to Carnegie hall while rebellious Lulu failed to get

into Juilliard's pre-college division evinces that a particular *Bildung*—social success—requires one's relinquishing of individuality to a certain extent, if not all.

Despite the generic similarity between classical music training and Morettian “modern socialization,” the former rather functions as an antithesis to the latter in that classical music training essentially disables the learner's ability to self-possess. As C. B. Macpherson attests, the possessive quality of a modern liberal-democratic subject begins with the conception of the individual “as essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, owing nothing to society for them” (3). Neither of the protagonists in *Battle Hymn* clearly seems to be “an owner of [her]self” precisely because of the economic toll that had to be paid by someone else, even though it was the individuals' biological mother. What must be emphasized is that Chua's memoir after all demonstrates what is necessary for the success of “Chinese parenting” is the parent's ability to possess and purchase. To put differently, the particular kind of possessive individualism that Chua's *competitive Bildungsroman* generates, if any, is immutably grounded in generational support. To be sure, hiring renowned classical musicians as private mentors and buying expensive musical instruments definitely would not be possible but for the material resources and social status the parent has already achieved. For instance, Chua had to cash in one of her pension funds in order to buy “a really good violin” for Lulu, and as her husband, Jed, confessed the piano is “the most expensive piece of furniture [they] owned” (59). Being a tiger mom, after all, takes a lot of money, let alone the fact that it is time-consuming work. Accordingly, while Chua's “Chinese parenting” suggests one way for Asian Americans to achieve the “American Dream” and to enter the realm of the “white” American mainstream culture, it simultaneously eliminates the forward-looking

scenarios from those who are not as economically privileged as Chua's family. While deploying the image of a hard working mom, *Battle Hymn* undeniably promotes and defends the universalizing claims of the "American Dream." Calling herself someone "working psychotically hard" for both her own career and her daughters' education, Chua finds the primary cause of her daughters' success precisely in her personal performance (31).

Worth noting is, however, Chua's text not only reinforces but also destabilizes the myth of the "American Dream" in two major ways. Firstly, *Battle Hymn* racializes the "Dream" by reinforcing the idea that it would be a particular racial/ethnic group ("Chinese parents" vis-à-vis "tiger mom")—or at least a cultural attitude of the group ("Chinese parenting")—that will succeed academically. Secondly and more importantly, *Battle Hymn* in effect reveals classist aspects of the "Dream" by showing the hard-working "tiger mom" has to be in a financially good position, in order to fully exert "Chinese parenting." All in all, the discourse of "tiger mom" feeds the myth of "model minority," by promoting the ideas that the "Chinese" youth will be always successful and there will be a constant presence of a well-off parent behind them. As two sides of the same coin, the stereotypes of "model minority" and "tiger mom" show a continuum of the old Asian stereotype, the "yellow peril," which originated in the late nineteenth century. The continuum between the "yellow peril" and the "model minority," despite the apparent disjunction, has been pointed out notably by Gary Okihiro in his renowned book, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. While the newer stereotype is seemingly filled with positive elements (such as "The work ethic, education, family values, and self-help—WASPish attributes" represented in "model

minority”) in comparison with the old one, Okihiro argues, both Asian stereotypes position “Asia and America as antipodes, never meeting” (140). For both “yellow peril” and “model minority” are generated by the fear that Asians as the Other will threaten white dominance through either military and sexual conquest or economic and social challenge. Okihiro goes on to note:

The yellow peril and the model minority are not poles, denoting opposite representations along a single line, but in fact form a circular relationship that moves in either direction. We might see them as engendered images: the yellow peril denoting a masculine threat of military and sexual conquest, and the model minority symbolizing a feminized position of passivity and malleability. Moving one direction along the circle, the model minority mitigates the alleged danger of the yellow peril, whereas reversing direction, the model minority, if taken too far, can become the yellow peril. (142)

The “tiger mom” as the newest product of the ever-changing American stereotype of Asian otherness truly exhibits a compound of the two old stereotypes, as well as retains the same essence despite the long evolution. To clarify, the “tiger mom” puts forward the image of the aggressive, matriarchal Asian figure, and it sheds light on the continuum between “perils” and “models” more evidently.

As much as the old (“perils”) and the newer (“models”) Asian stereotypes have been, the newest (“tiger mom”) stereotype hinders an even development of the racial group, as a whole, in the end. In particular, the “model minority” and the “tiger mom” stereotypes have produced negative influences upon the development of the Asian American youth. In essence, “Chinese parenting” is based on a reductionist assumption that one is solely responsible for one’s competence. As Chua asserts, “Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their child can get them. If their child doesn’t get them, the Chinese parent assumes it’s because the child didn’t work hard enough” (52). Evidently, Chua’s paradigm does not allow room for the presence of

underprivileged “Chinese” families who do not have access to material resources and who rather suffer the absence of a materially competent parental figure (as in the cases of Ng’s *Bone* and Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging*). As Helen Gym, a parent activist and board member of Asian Americans United, points out in “Tiger Moms and Model Minority Myth,” the Asian American stereotypes of “tiger mom” and “model minority” and successful stories of the few (such as *Battle Hymn*) reinforce “personal responsibility” and “culture of poverty” interpretations of low achievements which often blame low-income families of racial minority groups rather than the cause and impact of racism and poverty on their children’s ability to climb up. “By implying that one set of students’ moral and cultural values can overcome any obstacle,” Gym argues, “it implicitly condemns other students of color for allegedly failing to have the moral and cultural resources to do the same” (34-35). The consequences are material, which include the denial or lack of educational services—such as language services, testing for special education, multiracial ethnic studies, just to name a few—informal quotas in higher education, and neglect of racial harassment and violence in schools. As Gym notes, the Asian stereotypes create the false assumption that Asians are the group with the bootstraps culture therefore they do not need much political attentions or social resources, and it is this assumption that has caused the denial or lack of a host of educational services. Although the “tiger mom” may result in the individualistic cultivation and academic achievement of the child of the already privileged, it is obvious that in the long run it would hinder the development of the youth as a whole by exacerbating the lack of equal opportunities for all. In this regard, a particular claim that Chua’s “Chinese parenting” and the “American Dream” valorize (“if you work hard, you will make it”)

assumes another claim: “if you did not make it, that means you did not work hard enough.”

As such, Chua tellingly exposes the exclusiveness of the “American Dream” that is supposedly universal for general public. A unique *Bildungsroman* narrating the mother’s experiences of raising her daughters as successful, competitive persons, *Battle Hymn* reveals the real face of contemporary American society, presumably based upon universalizing claims of possessive individualism, economic liberalism, and liberal capitalism. As opposed to its universalizing claims, *Battle Hymn* demonstrates that the “Dream” has been proven to be a myth, rather than a reality, which is only possible for a selected few or those who are already privileged. If the “American Dream” underscores the possibility of “rags to riches” regardless of one’s givens (race, gender, and class), the reality of this nation shows the opposite: social *immobility*. A recent study of mobility within the U.S. by four economists at Harvard and University of California at Berkeley confirms the real lesson of the “tiger mom” by indicating that the intergenerational social mobility in this country is actually lower than in many other developed countries, and it prioritizes those already advantaged.¹⁴ While the study and Chua’s parenting memoir reflect each other, both documents suggestively evinces that the laissez-fair attitude of liberalism does not universally guarantee the freedom of every child’s social mobility regardless of his/her parents’ material circumstances. Instead, Chua’s parenting memoir teaches us what is prerequisite to one’s possessive-individualization is rather an extreme

¹⁴ Named as “The Equality of Opportunity Project” the study done by Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez came out in July, 2013. For more info., see their web site: <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/>

regulation of the individual (child) and the system (family having an authoritative parent).

Chua's "Chinese parenting" is a modern day bourgeois Asian American familial strategy to secure the competence of family members-subjects in an age when the liberal state completely ignores the role to equally protect the freedom of citizens-subjects. An irony is that the youth being indebted to his/her parents is unquestionably presumed to be the extension of the predecessors in the model of "Chinese parenting," which is the opposite of the condition of self-possession. Chua writes:

Here's a question I often get: "But Amy, let me ask you this. Who are you doing all this pushing for—your daughters"—and here always the cocked head, the knowing tone—"or *yourself*?" I find this a very Western question to ask (because in Chinese thinking, the child is the extension of the self). But that doesn't mean it's not an important one. (148 Emphasis original)

Although Chua is keenly aware of the cultural difference between "Chinese" and "Western" values as for the concept of subject (individual as the indebted vs. the self-possessed), she goes on to affirm "Chinese parenting" is "unequivocally 100% for [her] daughters," rather than for herself (148). Nonetheless, Chua cannot deny the fact that this familial welfare system creates an expectation to the beneficiary to serve the parents if the need arises. Chua writes: "My parents always paid for everything (for their daughters), but fully expect to be cared for and treated with respect and devotion when they get old" (55). According to Chua, this "Chinese" parents-child relationship is not solely monetary; it is also psychological, deeply grounded in the ideology of Confucianism. "For Chinese people," Chua elaborates, "when it comes to parents, nothing is negotiable. Your parents are your parents, you owe everything to them (even if you don't), and you have to do everything for them (even if it destroys your life)" (98).

Chua's conceptualization of the "Chinese" individual thus shows an antithesis to Macphersonian possessive individual who owns oneself, owing nothing to society.

In Chua's paradigm of the "Chinese" individual, one is innately indebted to one's parents; regardless of the family's class status, one owes *everything* to one's parents, including your own person and capacities. Therefore we see a similar pattern of parents-child relationship—or the feeling of indebtedness—in Chua's text to those in Ng's and Yamanaka's *Bildungsromane*, despite the apparent difference in the families' economic statuses. Although Chua would most likely not need any material support from her descendants to retire (as opposed to the parents of Ng's and Yamanaka's protagonists), she has a casual expectation, if not desperate, to be taken in by her daughters. As Chua took in her mother-in-law fighting leukemia for her last several days, Chua happens to wonder "whether down the road if [Chua] was sick, the girls would take [her] into their homes and do the same for [her]—or whether they would opt for happiness and freedom." And she was proud and glad that the girls had witnessed their parents serving their grandmother in "the Chinese way" (100). In the model of these reciprocal expectations and protections between the parent and the child, there is no need for government to intervene to secure the freedom and welfare of subjects-citizen, whether it be the youth or the elderly. All in all, "Chinese parenting" exclusively appropriated by and for (upper-)middle-class families is not only a means to revise the minimum protections of the liberal government, but also in effect serves to reinforce the status quo of American neo-liberal class society. Accordingly, Chua's *competitive Bildungsroman* redefines the concept of happiness—which is a final objective of the classical *Bildungsroman* protagonist—precisely as an outcome of the hierarchal, generational

relationship, not of the individualistic freedom one savors solely as an owner of oneself. As Chua ponders the question of whether Sophia and Lulu would opt for either “Chinese” (the responsibility to serve parents) or “American” (an absolute happiness and freedom from the responsibility) way, she had to insist that happiness comes precisely through the generational relationship therefore one should not need to sacrifice one to save the other. To the author’s knowledge, “(self-possessive) Western children definitely (are) no happier than (indebted) Chinese ones” because the latter is the one who would “happily describe themselves as devoted to their parents and unbelievably grateful to them” (101).

In Chua’s *competitive Bildungsroman*, parents/family substitutes government/society at large, so much so the narrative conflict and resolution are represented as those between the protagonist (Sophia and Lulu) and parents/family (Amy). Interestingly, although Sophia and Lulu are the daughters of the same person, they present quite different developmental *Bildung* narratives. While Sophia’s narrative demonstrates a harmonious, lenient reconciliation of the conflict, Lulu’s narrative, being loaded with a series of combatant battles between Lulu and Chua, barely reaches a resolution only after Chua announces to surrender and to give the freedom of choice back to Lulu. Chua’s announcement of losing the battle—“ “Lulu,” I said. “You win. It’s over. We’re giving up the violin” ”—is located right after the narrative climax, the family trip to Russia which turns into the most fiery battle between Lulu and Chua. And the announcement gives a resolution not only to Lulu’s *Bildung* narrative, but also to *Battle Hymn* as a whole (209). Despite the fact that *Battle Hymn* juxtaposes Sophia’s and Lulu’s contrasting stories of development and spends an almost equal amount of space for each daughter, Lulu is truly the one that gives a powerful narrative conflict, and then

resolution, to the *competitive Bildungsroman*. Already at the outset, Lulu's story creates a tension that develops into the narrative conflict as the memoir progresses. At the outset of her text, Chua spends first three short chapters to introduce the "tiger mom," Sophia, and Lulu. The third Chapter introduces Lulu to readers as the "wild one" like "a feral horse," who already challenged her "tiger mom" at the age of three. After having her "first face-off" with Lulu who already resisted to learn how to play the piano when Chua gave the first try, the author announces the outbreak of the battle: "The battle lines were drawn," Chua proclaims, "and [Lulu] didn't even know it" (11-13). Given the ways Chua structured the text, *Battle Hymn*'s main focus is definitely Lulu (rather than the "tiger mom" or the other daughter, Sophia), and the text above all underscores the ways in which Lulu re-gains the freedom of choice by winning the battle with her tiger mom. The comments Sophia made after she read the draft of *Battle Hymn*—"You should definitely dedicate this book to Lulu . . . She's obviously the heroine. I'm the boring one readers will cheer against. She's the one with *verve* and *panache*"—makes the same point that Lulu is the real protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* (225).

Indeed, it was Lulu who has successfully come to claim the freedom to choose throughout *Battle Hymn*. As the narrative goes on, Lulu is shored up as the only one who comes to realize ambivalent roles of classical music training; while it may equip you with the positive outcomes (such as gaining "respect" for standards and expertise and "control" over generational decline), it also renders the subject dispossessed of oneself through the oppressive system of hierarchies. As Lulu identifies herself strongly with the liberal individual whose political freedoms and rights ought to be inalienable, she strives to undermine the rules of the tiger mom. Not only does Lulu gain such an insight and

revolt against the authority, but she does also make Chua realize the fatal flaw in “Chinese parenting.” Right after the moment of climax at Red Square, Chua has come to admit that classical music training, after all, symbolizes “oppression” for both Lulu and herself:

For Lulu, [the violin] embodied oppression.

And as I walked slowly back across Red Square, I realized that the violin had begun to symbolize oppression for me too. Just picturing Lulu’s violin case sitting at home by the front door—at the last minute we’d decided to leave it behind, the first time ever—made me think of the hours and hours and years and years of labor, fighting, aggravation, and misery that we’d endured. For what? I also realized that I was dreading with all my heart what lay ahead. (208)

This is the moment when the tiger mom, who unquestionably trusted the universalizing effects of “Chinese parenting,” finally comes to realize the individuality of Lulu with whom the method has proven *not* to work and will not work. It was also the moment Chua realizes all the sacrifice—economic and psychological—she had to endure in order to vicariously secure her descendants’ socio-economic status. The denouement that follows the moment of climax provides a resolution to the youth as Chua gives the freedom of choice back to Lulu. Chua writes, “I did the most Western thing imaginable: I gave her the choice. I told her that she could quite the violin if she wanted and do what she liked instead, which at the time was the play tennis” (212). However, it does not seem to give the same resolution to Chua since she is now worried about the uncertain future that Lulu’s own choice (playing tennis) would grant the youth; the tiger mom goes on to lament: “What a failure” (214). By leaving the story there, *Battle Hymn*’s open-ended conclusion symbolically signals another beginning of Lulu’s unpredictable journey.

As opposed to Lulu who is represented as a rebel, Sophia is described as a rather obedient, model “Chinese” child who accepts all the demands of the tiger mom and

produces all the achievements Chua has dreamed for her daughters. Sophia's successful accomplishments are presented without much conflict, even before readers finish one third of the whole *Bildungsroman*. After initially earning the right to perform as a piano soloist with a New Haven youth orchestra at Yale University's Battell Chapel Competition at the age of ten by winning the Greater New Haven Concerto competition, Sophia wins a series of competitions, including the one to play at Carnegie Hall as a piano soloist, which was the dream of the tiger mom. In spite of the fact that Sophia may seem to be simply presented as the obedient one who uncharacteristically relinquishes her individuality, the narrative depicts Sophia's story as an example of the harmonious modern socialization. Chua includes part of Sophia's school essay that describes the youth's recollection on the day she played at Carnegie hall, which was "one of the happiest days of her life," according to herself (139):

I didn't quite understand what was happening until I found myself backstage, petrified, quaking. My hands were cold. I couldn't remember how my piece started. An old mirror betrayed the contrast between my chalk-white face and my dark gown, and I wondered how many other musicians had stared into that same glass.

Carnegie Hall. It didn't seem right. This was supposed to be the unattainable goal, the carrot of false hope that would keep me practicing for an entire lifetime. And yet here I was, an eight-grader, about to play "Juliet as a Young Girl" for the expectant crowd.

I had worked so hard for this . . . So much of me was manifested in this piece, in one way or another. At that moment, I realized how much I loved this music.

Performing isn't easy—in fact, it's heartbreaking. You spent months, maybe years, mastering a piece; you become a part of it, and it becomes a part of you. (140)

Standing in front of the mirror at the backstage of Carnegie Hall, Sophia acknowledges her achievement, which is supposedly "the unattainable goal" for the most American children. Although her writing shows the genuine mentality of an eighth-grade girl who

feels nervous to play on a big stage, she self-assuredly claims her ownership to the privilege as someone who has mastered virtuous skills of European classical music. Only by the moment Sophia realizes that she becomes a part of the music could she claim an ownership of classical music, which eventually grants her a sudden sense of happiness. This felicity is upwardly mobile in the sense that it is acquired as she identifies herself with the prestigious “many other musicians” who have played at Carnegie Hall as well as the genius musician who created the music she is playing.

Provided that Sophia’s *Bildung* narrative seems to be devoid of a structural conflict, and more importantly, of the Morettian generic break from “the old,” some may argue that Sophia is rather a figure of an antihero lacking the qualities of the *Bildungsroman* hero. Nonetheless, the final chapter of the *Bildungsroman*, “Coda,” serves to round out the other protagonist by giving her a chance to revise the narrative, which has been vicariously composed by her mother. In the chapter, Chua confesses that she asked her daughters to participate in revising the *Bildungsroman*, which is another element illuminating the turning point of the tiger mom. This gesture is symbolic of the loosening of the hierarchies, which have prevented the youth from the self-fashioning of her own life plot. As Sophia reads her mom’s draft, she poignantly says to Chua: “It’s not possible for you to tell the complete truth.” Sophia goes on to say, “You’ve left out so many facts. But that means no one can really understand. For example, everyone’s going to think that I was *subjected* to Chinese parenting, but I wasn’t. I went along with it, by my own choice” (226 Emphasis original). By claiming that it was “[her] own choice” to follow “Chinese parenting,” Sophia subverts the pre-existing power relations between the authoritative, coercive parent and the obedient, malleable child, and further renders the

outcome of “Chinese parenting” her own achievement. In so doing, the “Coda” chapter magically renders Sophia’s *Bildung* narrative exemplary of the harmonious, reconciliatory fusion of individuation and socialization through the process of internalization, consent, and conviction—instead of the forceful power of coercion.

Chua’s *Battle Hymn* generating the two contrasting coming-of-age stories entitles us to question the (self-)possessive assumptions the *Bildungsroman* and the “American Dream” are grounded in. Throughout the text Sophia, who self-assuredly decided to accept the tiger mom’s restrictions, becomes the one who gets to reproduce the Morettian “ideal paradigm of modern socialization: I *desire* to do what I in any case *should* have done” (Moretti 21, Emphasis original). Yet, while contesting a necessity of generic revisions—or more specifically a necessity of generational interventions—for one’s successful modern socialization, *Battle Hymn* in effect demystifies the universalizing claims of the literary genre and the American ideals about the subject and his/her world: one ought to be free to seek an unknown mobility to build a new future rather than confine oneself to the relations of the past. Moretti’s remarks that the *Bildungsroman* hero must, and he truly *could*, “dismantle the continuity between generations” rather than replicate “one’s father’s work” point to the genre’s akin relation to the political theory of possessive individualism, which is also central to the assumption of the “American Dream” (Moretti 4). While both the literary genre and the American socio-political ethos publicly valorize liberal concepts of—and the individual’s needs for—freedom, autonomy, and independence, Chua’s modern day Asian American *Bildungsroman* highlights the improbability of the ideal subject formation but for institutional interventions; central to Sophia’s success, above all, was the opulent tiger mom’s

parenting. Chua's text in the end demonstrates that the liberal individual who would plot one's successful life stories, "owing nothing to society," is rather a mirage than a reality, particularly in the context of the twenty-first-century America where there is rarely institutional supports from the nation-state to guarantee the equal maximization of the youth's potential regardless of one's descent relations (such as race and class).

Meanwhile, one should bear in mind, Chua's text shores up Lulu, not Sophia, as the real protagonist of her *Bildungsroman*. By giving Lulu the title "the heroine," *Battle Hymn* in the end prioritizes the importance of the freedom of choice to the construction of an idealized liberal subject (225). The fact that Lulu's reclaiming of freedom of choice is presented as the outcome of her coming-of-age journey is telling. *Battle Hymn* rendering it an *outcome* of a personal battle, rather than a *condition* of the Asian American subject's particular social world, illuminates the ambivalent natures of the tiger mom as a contested site where the Asian American youth is at once provided with material competence and stripped of one's freedom, supposedly inalienable in American liberal democratic society. Lulu's achievement of *Bildung* is thus only presented as half-finished since she has attained the Americanness as the political precisely at the expense of the Americanness as the economic: "Lulu decided to quit orchestra, giving up her concertmaster position in order to free up Saturday mornings for tennis," laments the tiger mom (212-3). Chua's expression of sorrow and concerns for her second daughter at the end of her *Bildungsroman*—"I was dreading with all my heart what lay ahead"—is grounded in the uncertainty of Lulu's societal, economic success as a tennis player (208). The fortune of the true "heroine" of the Asian American *Bildungsroman* is called into question, so much so *Battle Hymn* entitles readers to ponder the question of what it means for the Asian

American youth to be self-possessive in contemporary, supposedly liberal democratic America. If the “American Dream” exists only for an already-privileged few who self-assuredly relinquish the liberties of possessive individualism, is the heroine’s “winning” the battle something the audience could truly cheer for?

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

I have tried to suggest that the *Bildungsroman* provides an important site of contestation for Asian American writers living in the era of *de jure* inclusion. As I have examined in the foregoing chapters with reference to Franco Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* is incisively based upon a modern liberal individual's desire to self-invent against restrictions of old-world hierarchies. By figuring the genre as a "victorious" literary tool with which an immature, minor youth becomes a self-assured citizen, Moretti envisions a particular individual and world for his paradigm of modern socialization: the Macphersonian (self-)possessive subject living in an idealized, raceless and classless society. The assumption of the genre mirrors the American national ideals that have valorized the image of a self-made man and promulgated the universalizing idea of the "American Dream." I have attempted to show how contemporary writers of Asian descent, Ng, Liu, Yamanaka, and Chua, challenge the self-proclaimed national ideals and reconfigure Americanness by redeploying the generic conventions of the *Bildungsroman*.

One of the writers' main concerns is to challenge the U.S. construction of the Asian's image as outsiders, sojourners, strangers, or "foreigner-within" at best, a national thought-process that has continued even after the repeal of the Asian exclusion acts. As I suggested, the writers, and protagonists in their *Bildungsromane*, are driven to interrogate various American stereotypes of Asian otherness—an "immigrant" in a "bachelor society," a "model minority," a "leper," or a "tiger mom"—all of which continuously demonstrates an antithesis to American democratic authenticity, citizenship, and

individual sovereignty. Indeed, it was a necessary task for their *Bildungsroman* protagonists who are in the process of plotting their own life stories by self-fashioning who they are in a presumably democratic American society. In delineating how the Asian American *Bildungsromane* are grounded in the historical binary of “Asian” and “American,” I have argued that Ng, Liu, Yamanaka, and Chua find the contradiction between the idealized claims of the literary genre and the nation-state and the particular histories and experiences the protagonists, and their predecessors, have had over the course of subject formation.

In order to understand how Asian American writers utilize the narrative of the *Bildungsroman* to contest Americanness, I had to first consider how they achieve generic transformations in particularizing their differential *Bildung* narratives. As I have suggested, the writers of the Asian American *Bildungsroman*, above all, use the triangular relationship amongst the nation-state, family, and subject/citizen in order to highlight the contradictory presence of old-world restrictions, whether it be hereditary burden or inherited privilege. In tracking this particular generic intervention, I have been interested in examining how *class* of the protagonists’ parents—as an element of descent relations along with *race*—has a tremendous impact on their capacities, decision-making, and future prosperity. In addition to the use of the triangular relationship as a structural necessity, the literary tradition of the Asian American *Bildungsroman* has also fused the conventional *Bildungsroman* with other non-fictional, (auto)biographical genres including autobiography, grief memoir, and parenting memoir. I have attempted to show how the Asian American writer’s mixing genres in creating their own unique *Bildungsroman* forms calls into question the deep-seated American mentality that has

excluded Asians economically, culturally, and politically with a sweeping overgeneralization despite intra-group heterogeneities.

While using particular Asian American histories, both Ng (the legislative history of Asian exclusion) and Yamanaka (the history of leprosy settlement) demonstrate how the U.S. is the generator reproducing dispossessed Asian families, which then become hereditary burdens for the next generation, Leila and Ivah. So much so, the lower-class Asian American protagonists had to invent a communal Asian American subjecthood, which contrasts to the modern liberal, self-possessive individual the conventional *Bildungsroman* assumes. As opposed to the unassimilated, dispossessed parents of Ng's and Yamanaka's protagonists, Liu shows how he has become "the (American) mainstream" precisely through the paradigm of assimilation. In so doing, Liu underlines the contradiction of assimilation, a process that is only allowed to a selected few with material resources. As Liu's *Bildungsroman* depicts, a "(social) immigrant/subject" must "dilute" his ancestral culture in order to attain the American democratic, sovereign selfhood. In comparison with Liu's *assimilative Bildungsroman* generated by the proportional dynamic between Chineseness and Americanness, I observe how Yamanaka creates a *Bildungsroman* that deconstructs the historical binary of "Asian" and "American," and of "leper" and "citizen." While seeking her own subject formation as a poverty-stricken Japanese Hawaiian daughter of the leprosy victims, Ivah finds that her particular narrative could be encompassed by neither exclusive the "Asian" nor the "American." As Ivah differentiates her identity from both dominant Asians and white haoles, her own particular *Bildung* cannot be achieved by assimilating exclusive into the "Asian" or the "American." Inasmuch as the logic of "either/or" does not suit her unique

identity, Iyah had to find a way to actualize the *Bildungsroman*'s logic of "as well as" by particularizing the logic with her coming to terms with her parents' history of leprosy settlement and its material legacy upon her. Indeed, Yamanaka's adaptation of "as well as" renders Liu's "either/or" strategy problematic, in the sense that the latter in the end reinforces the historical binary of "Asian" and "American" by promulgating culturalist, neo-racial race relations. Furthermore, Yamanaka's model demands that we rethink how assimilation—as an indicator of "success" in contemporary America—operates. That is, if assimilating into the mainstream America requires the Asian youth to disavow his/her particularities, could the normative model of assimilation truly be an exemplary mode of one's "harmonious" development?

Like Yamanaka, Chua, too, does not seem to agree with Liu's exclusive strategy. Being keenly aware of the ostensibility of the "American Dream," Chua aggressively deploys the anti-liberal, un-American figure of "tiger mother" in order to discipline and prepare her two daughters as competitive persons. By creating the new Asian cultural stereotype (tiger mom) Chua challenges the American idealized assumptions about the relationship between the nation-state and subject/citizen. The removal of the first person singular pronoun "I" in *Battle Hymn*, I argued, is indicative of Chua's unique generic intervention to secure her daughters' "success" in an age when the neo-liberal nation-state ignores the role to protect subjects/citizens' equal rights and freedoms. An irony, in this case, is that the youth becomes indebted to their mother; so much so their rights and freedoms to self-possession are fatally challenged although the tiger mom's "Chinese parenting" might grant them material success.

By the time I finished my foregoing chapters, one of my writers, Amy Chua, released another book, *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explains the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* (2014), co-authored with her husband, Jed Rubenfeld. As I was in the process of gathering my thoughts to write an epilogue of this dissertation that deals with such a variety of Asian American *Bildungsromane* written by writers from diverse cultural backgrounds, I found it extremely intriguing to observe the event and following interviews on media through which Chua clarified as to what makes “America’s overachieving groups,” exemplified by her previous book’s main figure: the tiger mother. Along with “a superiority complex” and “impulse control,” Chua points to the feeling of “insecurity” as three critical catalysts of America’s tiger moms and her successful kids. Listening to the particular word (“insecurity”) coming out from the mouth of someone like Chua was intriguing, and rather perplexing, in that Chua, Professor of Law at Yale, is readily at home with the culture and class of the mainstream America. As I saw her explanation, it was ever clear to me that Asian American writers—despite their heterogeneities in class, gender, ethnicity, and locality—are all more or less affected by the exclusive notions of race—essentialist and/or culturalist—therefore they feel the urgency to fight “insecurity” by claiming, challenging, and revising the “American Dream.”

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